



A decent place to live:

Homes fit for Key Workers



July 2021

Report by APSE for UNISON



About UNISON

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union in the United Kingdom with over 1.3 million members, and one of the largest unions in Europe. UNISON members work predominantly in public services, including local government, education, health and outsourced services. UNISON is highly regarded amongst Housing workers for its campaigning approach to housing issues.

As a trade union, UNISON provides support to members on work related issues, including protection and representation at work, help with pay and conditions of service and legal advice. UNISON is also a campaigning union and is active in public policy issues. Over many years UNISON has argued that the marketisation and fragmentation of social housing has had a direct impact both upon its housing members, who have struggled to meet the public service demands for affordable housing placed upon them, and their wider members who as public servants and citizens in their own right have often faced the struggles of finding a suitable affordable home to rent or buy.



About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is owned by its members. UNISON has been a lifelong associate member of APSE.

Working on behalf of its members APSE maintains a network of local government officers, managers, councillors and trade union representatives from local authorities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Working on a not-for-profit basis, APSE is dedicated to promoting excellence in the delivery of frontline services to local communities around the UK. Through the extensive APSE network, more than 300 local authorities and organisations are able to share information and expertise on vital frontline services, ask for advice and innovative solutions, and develop new, viable ways forward in an effort to help one another.

APSE provides one of the UK's largest research programme on local government issues and like UNISON has campaigned for the recognition of the role of council housing in meeting the UK's housing crisis.

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more information.

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About the research team

This report was written and researched by **Mo Baines** of **APSE** who is the **Head of Communication and Coordination**. It was supported by **Matt Ellis**, who is **APSE's Communications Officer**, in conducting very many interviews to support the case studies. Thanks also to **Paul O'Brien**, **APSE's Chief Executive** who shared his extensive housing knowledge, and to **Vickie Hacking**, **APSE's Principal Advisor** for her support to this work.

Thanks also to **Sylvia Jones**, **UNISON**, for her input in scoping and driving this report and to **James Bull**, **Andrew Dobbie** and **Susan Galloway** also of **UNISON** for their advice and knowledge.

Research methodology

The research team conducted initial scoping roundtables with UNISON housing representatives and UNISON officers. This explored the context of housing and the exposure of issues, which in many cases have been highlighted, and in some areas accelerated, as a result of the health pandemic. The emerging issues were further explored at subsequent roundtables to test and challenge findings.

The research draws upon a detailed literature review of existing housing studies, alongside analysis of statistics which track housing need, house building, and the patterns of reliance from public sector house building to the now prevalent model of reliance on market-based models of delivery and the growth in the private rented sector. Findings were then triangulated against the results of the UNISON Housing Survey amongst its UK wide membership.

Due to ongoing social distancing during the course of the research case study interviews were conducted online; nevertheless, this helped to provide a rich context to the interviews drawing out innovative practices. Whilst there are differences within each case study, in terms of approaches, geography and local demography, and housing needs, the commonality of each is the role of the local authority in shaping housing markets to the benefit of local communities and those who live and work within them.

Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Executive summary	6
Chapter 1: Housing need in the UK	10
Chapter 2: Housing supply and public sector workers	16
Chapter 3: How can we respond to housing needs?	22
Chapter 4: The role of local authorities in housing	27
Chapter 5: Post COVID Recovery and Housing Need	35
Chapter 6: Voices of the people	40
Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations	44
Chapter 8: Case Studies	48

Foreword



As the General Secretary of a campaigning union, I make no apology for keeping the issue of decent affordable housing high on our agenda. Since UNISON was formed in 1993, housing has always been at the forefront of our conference debates. Because we care about the people our members serve, but we also care about the struggles of our own members, when it comes to affording a decent place to live.

A safe, secure home should not be the preserve of the rich or 'high earners'. It should be a basic entitlement for all UK citizens. Sadly, the lack of affordable housing means that our members, working in housing services, are faced with the daily challenge of trying to find people homes which are simply not there. And public service workers

are finding it increasingly difficult to access council houses or to afford decent rented accommodation.

The housing crisis impacts on all sections of society. We know we have families desperately in need of homes, young people, and older single people and those on low incomes, struggling to find decent affordable homes. The problems can be all the more acute for people living with a disability, for those leaving care, and for those escaping domestic violence.

This is an important and timely report and I hope it will influence politicians, decision makers and housing policy.

As a nation, we managed to build a whole new generation of council housing, when the UK emerged from the horrors of war in 1945, surely it is possible to capture that spirit and innovation now?

Let's kickstart our post-COVID recovery with a commitment to building new green council homes and developing green construction skills. Let's be ambitious in our vision for council housing that provides high quality homes for generations to come.

Christina McAnea

UNISON General Secretary

Introduction

Across the UK it is well documented that decent affordable housing is increasingly hard to come by. Many would argue that the UK doesn't have one housing crisis but multiple housing crises, played out differently, dependent upon the geography and supply of housing within local areas.

However, regardless of these differing local factors, housing is increasingly unaffordable for workers who struggle to find decent affordable homes in which to live near to their place of work, or indeed, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a place in which to work if needed.

This research paper, produced by APSE and commissioned by UNISON, explores the issues of housing through the prism of both housing needs of UK workers, and in particular public sector workers, as well as the role of local authorities and social landlords in meeting housing challenges.

Whilst it is not intended to make a 'special case' for public sector workers to be prioritised over other workers in respect of housing needs, it does nevertheless reflect on the pay pressures on many public sector workers. It reflects on what this may mean in attracting and retaining public sector workers who are unable to find a decent affordable home in which to live. It also considers the wider issues of fairness with many groups across the economy priced out of housing markets due to the cost of buying or renting a home.

This report therefore explores housing need across the UK, the issues of housing supply, how the UK government administrations and the public sector in particular can respond to intervene in housing markets and the specific role of local authorities in addressing housing need.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issues of standards, space and housing quality. Therefore, the initial scope of this report has been broadened to include these issues.

Finally, the report explores case studies of people and places, drawing upon UNISON's survey results from its membership as well as examples of direct interventions by local councils in delivering the new homes that are desperately needed.

Jon Richards

UNISON, Head of Education and Local Government

Executive summary

We were commissioned by UNISON to examine the role of local Government in delivering more affordable homes. But the context of the coronavirus emergency has laid bare the extent of the housing crisis, and how our housing system falls far short of meeting the needs of working people.

Councils struggled to safeguard homeless people from the virus infection. Millions of workers were deployed to home-working. Millions more were furloughed. Vulnerable people were told to shield for their own safety. The common thread to emerge was that the 'stay at home' message for many people meant staying in homes that were palpably unsuitable. The inadequacy of space in which to work, the poor quality of many existing homes, where families struggled to have an area for their children to use for home education, let alone decent internet connectivity to enable that learning. Young workers sharing houses in multiple occupation had no escape from bedrooms that doubled as offices, and many people were unable to properly shield because they had no option but to share kitchens and bathrooms with strangers. The pandemic has peeled back the veneer of what 'stay at home' has really meant to millions of UK citizens.

This report therefore considers both the role of local councils in delivering affordable homes, alongside the contribution made by other non-profit housing providers, such as housing associations, and the impact of COVID-19 on housing needs. We consider the impact of the health pandemic on UNISON members, many of whom are rightly regarded as key workers, and the plight of all workers, who kept the UK moving through the pandemic. It also reflects on the potential of action to tackle housing issues to contribute to the building of local economies and tackling the climate emergency.

This research finds: –

- The decline in funding for council housing is matched by a decline in the numbers of new homes being built.
- Workers in some areas of the UK would need to earn over 12 times their salary to afford a home in which to live. Public sector pay cannot match the cost of housing in many areas of the UK, particularly in London and the South East
- Private Rented Sector rent levels outstrip earnings with the PRS doubling since 2000 leaving 97% of social renters with a gap between local housing allowance and rent.
- A 27–30 year old would need 18 years to save for a deposit as house-prices continue to outstrip earnings
- The lack of regulation on Private Rented Sector rents means the only solution is to increase the supply of homes for social rent
- The lack of affordable homes to both rent and buy means workers are struggling to live near their work in large swathes of the UK
- The COVID-19 health pandemic has exposed the poor quality of UK homes, with a growth in younger workers living in Houses in Multiple Occupation, which have expanded by 20% since 2013, demonstrating that housing quality is being neglected in the approach to delivering units to maximise yield to the private sector rather than much-needed new homes

- The lack of supply and the interface with land values has a direct impact on the numbers of affordable homes available for workers to rent or buy
- The planning system, coupled with the expansion of Permitted Development Rights in England, leaves a vacuum in effective regulation. Councils in many areas are left unable to secure enough affordable homes for local people to buy or rent.
- The developer-led market is failing generations of workers unable to access a decent home and exacerbating the housing crisis
- The longer the housing crisis continues, the bigger the gap in meeting the needs for homes to rent or buy at affordable levels. Unmet demand for affordable homes is growing exponentially
- Without a central role for local councils in the direct provision of new homes the housing crisis will continue to grow with a worsening effect, particularly on the most economically exposed citizens
- There is an opportunity for local councils in the post-pandemic economy to lead a green revolution in new build council homes, and in doing so they can help to provide new direct employment opportunities in construction, management, maintenance and placemaking in housing and neighbourhood level services.
- Small scale 'sticking plaster' interventions in addressing housing affordability or novel schemes to discount key worker housing, have failed to bring about the new homes needed or to address the crisis in affordability
- Only significant direct financial investment in building new homes through councils, and other non-profit providers will enable housing needs to be met, allowing workers to access an affordable home.

The findings of this research report are informed by considering the context of housing need in the UK, exploring some of the key policy differences in England, Scotland, Wales and to an extent Northern Ireland; the issues of housing supply and how this is impacting upon public sector workers, alongside other workers, acknowledging that the health pandemic has recast the value of certain jobs and sectors within the economy.

The report goes on to explore how to respond to the ongoing and worsening crisis in housing and explores in depth the role of local councils and their workforce in addressing housing need. This is not to diminish or dismiss the role of housing associations, and other non-profit bodies, in meeting housing needs, but to exemplify why councils remain critical to delivering new homes at scale. New build homes, particularly for social rent, cannot be left to market-based systems. Local state intervention is necessary and we show examples of where it is working.

Finally, the report explores housing through the prism of post pandemic recovery, and what a new generation of greener council housing could deliver both in terms of housing need and in helping to build a green economy. The report is informed by UNISON's own housing survey work, and the voices of those members working in, and delivering on, housing as a public service. Case studies at the end of this report share best practice and innovations in housing. These show how councils in areas with very different characteristics, with administrations controlled by various political parties, across England, Scotland and Wales are all demonstrating the value of council innovation and interventions in housing markets.

This report leads to 7 primary recommendations, as follows: –

1. Investment in a new generation of council housing, at scale, has to be at the heart of solving the crisis in affordable homes to rent.

This will mean leveraging capital investment levels last seen in the post-war years alongside a delivery strategy that pulls together the materials, supplies, land and skills needed to get homes built at the scale needed across the UK. The barriers and bureaucracy associated with Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA), and the lack of an HRA in around a third of English councils must be addressed to remove any barriers to delivering new council homes. Government subsidy for new build council housing in Scotland must be raised to match that for Registered Social Landlords (RSL) new build.

2. The new generation of council housing must maximise the opportunities for green growth and green construction skills

Responding to the housing crisis must also address the climate crisis. The new generation of council homes should therefore maximise the opportunities for local councils to develop and grow their local workforce; developing green apprenticeships, recruiting local workers into new fields of green construction, and skilling the workers of the future to meet the challenges of climate change. From new skills in green home-energy to securing green skills in local environmental services this approach secures the jobs and skills needed now and in a low-carbon future. This approach must be centred upon local councils as anchor institutions, nurturing sustainable growth and the wellbeing of residents at a community level, as opposed to extractive market-based economic models.

3. New homes must be ‘Healthy Homes’ and for this reason adoption of the Healthy Homes Act should be a priority

The Healthy Homes Act advocated by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) offers a powerful way for national governments and local councils to promote and secure good place-making. Enshrined in law, healthy homes principles would protect communities from poor quality housing, securing such simple but often ignored design principles of access to light, public realm, and quality and space standards.

Whilst in Scotland emerging legislation will support improvements within housing standards, such an Act in other UK administrations, would place a new duty on the Secretary of State or relevant Minister in a devolved administration to secure ‘the health, safety, wellbeing and convenience of people in or around new buildings, and on local authorities to plan for the long-term delivery of affordable housing’.

4. Re-empower councils with meaningful control of planning and place-making outcomes

Deregulation of planning and austerity has left councils feeling powerless to act in creating safe and strong, healthy and wealthy sustainable local communities – this must be reversed.

The ongoing use of Permitted Development Rights runs the risk of creating the slums of tomorrow. Poor quality housing developments, including changes of use which undermine the very concepts of communities, should have no place in modern housing development. Meaningful re-empowerment of councils, in planning controls and rebuilding council planning departments, must be at the heart of any plans to ‘build back better’

5. A wider exploration, and expansion of Living Rents pilots should be considered, giving immediate support to those living in housing poverty

Whilst Living Rents are not the only solution to housing affordability, better linking earnings and rent paid, would lift thousands out of rent poverty. This concept should be explored, tested and expanded. It will not substitute for building a new generation of council housing but would be a pragmatic support to those living now in poverty as a result of the cost of housing.

6. Welfare reforms have fundamentally damaged the link between household income and housing affordability. The link between Local Housing Allowance, housing benefit and rents should be restored to provide immediate relief to those facing an acute crisis of housing affordability.

Whilst Government injected some emergency cash into Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Universal Credit payments during the health pandemic, the LHA is not fit for purpose as it does not meet the true costs of rent. This places renters in a poverty trap, forced to either top up rents from meagre benefits or low pay or stopping people from finding a home to rent altogether.

A long-term restoration of the link between LHA, housing benefit and rents would provide relief to those facing hardship, beyond the current health crisis. This will also support local councils who face avoidable demands on homelessness services, and other services, because of the inadequacies of the current levels of LHA, housing benefits and unaffordable rents.

7. Right to Buy in England should be subject to local moratoriums

Abolition of Right to Buy in Scotland and Wales has enabled public authorities to better meet local housing need. English councils, in the absence of abolition of Right to Buy, should at the very least, be able to apply their own moratorium on Right to Buy sales, with full flexibility and autonomy to make decisions in the interests of their communities. The existing cycle of investment and enforced sales is ultimately harmful to the delivery of new homes. Local councils have the expertise and local knowledge to know best what delivers for their communities. They should be trusted to decide.

Chapter 1: Housing need in the UK

1.1. Housing need in numbers

Housing need is not a singular issue that can be determined simply by crunching numbers. It is a complex issue which is informed by data such as the number of households in the UK, the types of homes that are required to meet demand, which will be dependent on local need, prevention of homelessness and the concept of hidden homelessness, the tests of affordability which can vary from area to area, and what demand is currently being met and by what housing sectors, including the private sector, local councils, and other social landlords.

Housing need is often equated to the number of new homes that are needed to provide a decent and affordable home to any household that needs one. A household could be a single person, a single parent, a couple, a young family or a multi-generational household, or indeed any combination – so predicting future need is not always easy. In any event, as a measure, calculating estimates of housing need may not always pick up hidden housing needs; such as adults living with parents because they are unable to afford a home of their own or young people ‘sofa surfing’ with friends.

Estimates by Bramley, G. (2019) ¹ suggest that in England alone there is a need to build or create 340,000 new homes per annum by 2031 with at least 100,000 of these new homes available for social renters. New social housing is actually only reaching around 20,000 units per year at best. This means that the gap, between the need for social housing, and the speed at which this is made available, is ever increasing. The more delays to increasing social housing supplies the bigger the gap between unmet need and available homes.

1.2 Housing need across the UK

According to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) statistical data releases in 2018-2019, the total housing stock in England increased by around 241,000 homes. The data suggests that this is 9% higher than the previous year of 2017-2018 but, although the number of new homes appears to be growing, the growth rate is still lower than the estimated need.

According to a recent report ‘Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2021’ ² from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Chartered Institute of Housing and Shelter Scotland, it is estimated that to reduce housing need, alongside tackling child poverty and supporting economic recovery (particularly post-COVID) this would require 53,000 affordable homes to be delivered between 2021 –

1 Bramley, G. (2019). Housing supply requirements across Great Britain for low-income households and homeless people: Research for Crisis and the National Housing Federation; Main Technical Report. Heriot-Watt University. <https://doi.org/10.17861/bramley.2019.04>

2 Affordable Housing Need in Scotland (2019) final report https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1925668/Affordable_Housing_Need_in_Scotland_Post-21_final_report.pdf/nocache

2026. The report also suggests that this would need a cross-party commitment to invest £3.4 billion over 5 years.

Within Wales, the Welsh Government³ estimates between 6,200 and 8,300 will be needed by 2023/2024, with a central estimate of 7,400 units of new homes. The data also suggests that an annual average of 1,100 additional housing units will be needed simply to clear those in existing unmet need over the first 5 years. However, in Wales, slower household growth is predicted, with additional housing need overall decreasing over the remaining 15 years. In terms of where this need sits, taking the figure of 7,400 dwellings, 52% of the additional housing need or 3,900 units need to be market homes (private sector led) with 48% of the additional housing need or 3,500 needing to be additional affordable housing units.

Northern Ireland has seen the largest percentage growth in new homes in the UK, but, according to the Northern Ireland Statistical Release Agency (NISRA) ⁴as of 31 March 2019 there were 37,859 applicants on the social housing waiting list with a reported 26,387 in ‘housing stress’.

Housing need therefore varies in different countries, and is also different in regional, and sub-regional areas across the UK. This is perhaps most stark within England where house prices within London and the South East mean affordable homes do not meet demand. Contrast this with the North West, North East, and parts of the Midlands, where decline in some areas can lead to more affluent workers leaving areas of low-value housing due to income levels allowing moves to larger and more spacious properties, assisting in area decline in the poorest locations.

Therefore, it is safe to say, that housing need will manifest itself in many ways, including whether homes are genuinely affordable for local people. The lack of affordable homes will often lead to families having to share homes, perhaps with elderly parents or grandparents leading to overcrowding. A shortage of affordable homes will also have a negative impact on younger people or disabled adults who are unable to get a home best suited to their needs.

1.3 Has Government done enough?

With these clear shortages of suitable and affordable homes, it is only right to question what actions UK governments have so far taken to tackle housing issues, including addressing shortages of supply. With housing remaining high on the political agenda, in theory, this should lead to policy interventions to remedy the housing situation.

Whilst the history of social housing is well documented the last two decades, in particular, have attracted much attention because of successive governments attempts to deal with a range of housing issues. It is worth a short chronology of recent actions.

In 2000 a housing green paper was finally published by the then Housing Minister Nick Raynsford, following the Labour Party’s landslide general election victory in 1997. The new Labour Government had pledged to voters, not to increase public spending. A decision which many latterly believed to be a fatal mistake from a public services perspective, and which for housing, in particular, led to the

3 Welsh Government Estimates of housing need: 2019-based <https://gov.wales/estimates-housing-need-2019-based>

4 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-housing-stats-18-19-full-copy.PDF>

lowest ever levels of investment in social housing. The housing green paper, finally recognised the need for investment, and was therefore broadly welcomed. The green paper committed to provide a 'Decent Homes Standard' for social tenants. It is important to note that at this juncture in the early 2000s social housing stock had been neglected, through decades of economic policy that moved away from investment in public services, and housing standards were so deteriorated that many believed the backlog in repairs could not be met.

The Labour Government stated that they had inherited a £19 billion backlog of repairs. This Decent Homes policy, helped to rectify, in the main, the backlog in repairs albeit not universally. However, the implementation programme effectively forced many councils away from the direct provision of social housing. To achieve the funding for repairs under the decent homes standard local councils were forced initially to transfer stock, under a model known as LSVTs (Large Scale Voluntary Transfers) and after some significant resistance to LSVTs forced a change in policy, which then permitted councils to develop arms-length management organisations. Known as ALMO's, these models secured the necessary funding for repairs but removed much of the management and repairs work directly from councils. Furthermore, this model did not address the supply side issues, and the legacy of the Thatcher Government policy on 'Right to Buy' continued to deplete the housing stock. The policy also failed to address the standards in private dwellings, both owned and rented.

Whilst the focus on improving homes was welcomed by tenants the ongoing supply-side failure of this policy did two things. Decent homes became more attractive to tenants using the Right to Buy, but this coupled with ongoing demolition programmes, further depleted social housing stock available for people to rent. This in turn created more reliance on the private rented sector, as those seeking to rent from councils faced longer waiting lists in conjunction with councils being forced to tighten the eligibility criteria for council housing to prioritise those in most severe need. Private rental markets grew – with arguably poorer quality homes to rent – and the council owned social housing stock continued to decline in volume.

The problem of undersupply of homes was eventually taken seriously. The Barker Review of Housing Supply in 2004 suggested a new target to Government to build around 240,000 homes a year. This was intended to be implemented and the policy was supported in 2007 by the then new Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who also stated that he wished to see three million new homes created by 2020. Attempts at new social housing was put forward in 2009-2010 by the then Labour Housing Minister John Healey, but this was widely regarded as too little too late, coming at the tail end of the Government following the global financial crash.

Following the global financial crisis in 2008, housing as a policy issue, not unsurprisingly, dropped off from the list of political priorities. The 2010 Coalition Government did not waste much time in reasserting its support for Right to Buy; it also clearly set out its preferred policies to support homeowners rather than renters. The 2011 'Housing Strategy for England' also stated that social housing was 'not working'. This narrative of social housing being a safety net for those at the 'bottom of the pile' was damaging in that it undermined the argument that social housing has a place in supporting a much wider group of people into suitable homes. It also entangled the issue of social housing with welfare reforms. In 2015, the newly elected Cameron-led Conservative majority Government, free from the restrictions of the Coalition set out intentions in its Autumn Statement to build 400,000 new homes by the end of the decade. However, this policy was geared towards affordable homes to buy not just to rent.

A series of policy decisions introduced incentives for first-time buyers with 'help to buy' and shared ownership schemes, in addition to changes in mortgage rules allowing greater access to borrowing. The

summer budget of 2015 also introduced the ‘bedroom tax’ as one of a range of measures to support ongoing austerity budgeting. The impact of these measures was to in effect increase the affordability gap in renting a home. Furthermore, it weakened tenancy protections, removed housing benefits from 18–21-year-olds, whilst also capping overall benefits, and introduced the concept that higher earners in social housing should now pay market rents for the properties, they were living in. Many would argue that the 2015 changes set affordable housing provision, particularly within the rented sector, back decades.

Whilst the 2015 Government set out an ambition to deliver one million net additions to the housing stock by the end of the Parliament – which was then expected to be in 2020 – the figure of one million homes did not take into account the backlog of housing need. The House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs concluded in *Building More Homes* (2016),⁵ that the target “was not based on a robust analysis” and went on to recommend that the housing crisis required the development of at least 300,000 new homes annually “for the foreseeable future.” In addition to questioning whether a target of 1 million homes is ambitious enough, there was some doubt over whether the number was achievable.

In the aftermath of Brexit, an election in 2017 – brought about by the resignation of David Cameron as Prime Minister in 2016 – led to a new Conservative manifesto pledge, under Theresa May, to not only meet the 2015 commitment to deliver one million homes by the end of 2020 but to add a pledge to deliver a further half a million more homes by the end of 2022.

The newly elected Government also set about renaming the department responsible for housing the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with the emphasis on housing in its title. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was relaunched as Homes England. Following the resignation of Theresa May as Prime Minister, the Johnson-led Conservative Government of December 2019 similarly included a manifesto pledge likened to the 2017 manifesto. But once again this committed to a housing market being driven by homeownership. Housing policy in 2019 did not, therefore, appear to support the overall campaign pledges of ‘levelling up’ the UK for which it is fair to assume will only be achieved by having enough affordable homes to rent, as well as buy.

1.4 Housing by numbers

The lack of growth in social housing supply is exacerbated by severe increases in the numbers of people in need of homes at affordable rents.

The situation is not much better when it comes to those wanting to buy a home. The rise in house prices means that deposits are often out of reach, particularly for younger first-time buyers. A recent report by the Resolution Foundation⁶ (Wood & Clarke 2018) found that hypothetically a first-time buyer aged 27–30 years would need 18 years to save for a deposit for a home. This raises the spectre of those wanting to buy a home, and unable to rely upon family wealth for support, being effectively priced out of buying a home.

5 The House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs concluded in *Building More Homes* (2016) Available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldeconaf/20/2012.htm>

6 House of the rising son (or daughter) The impact of parental wealth on their children’s homeownership: John Wood & Stephen Clarke, December 2018, published by the Resolution Foundation

An analysis of the data does not suggest that the issue of the supply of affordable homes to rent or buy will drastically improve anytime soon. According to Homes England⁷ of the affordable homes started, in the third quarter of 2020/2021, just 3,295 were for Affordable Rent, which represents a 38% decrease on the 5,340 started the preceding year in the same quarter. A further 2,768 were for Intermediate Affordable Housing schemes (including Shared Ownership and Rent to Buy), representing a 34% decrease again on the same period in the preceding year. The number of Social Rent starts was 541, down by 26% on 734 previously. A remaining 2,293 affordable homes started with tenure to be confirmed, a decrease of 21% on 2,896 in 2019-20. Whilst the impact of COVID-19 may have created further reductions in supplies of affordable homes coming onto the market, these figures starkly illustrate the paucity of supply of affordable homes to rent or buy.

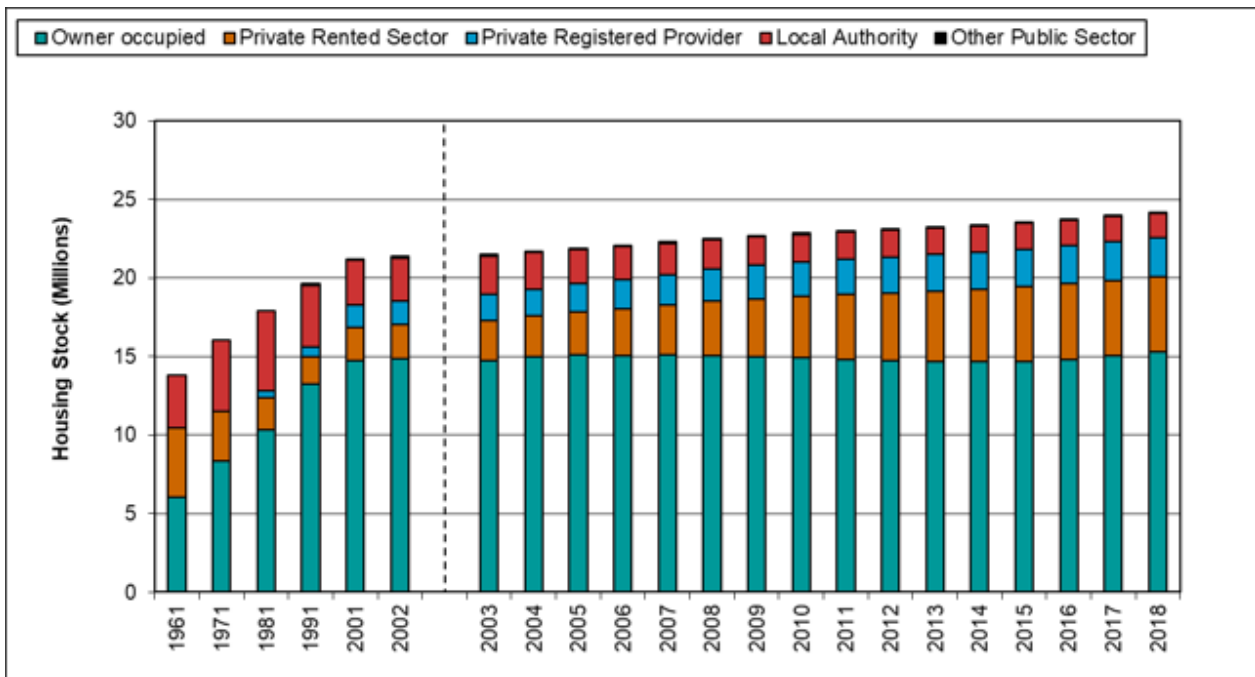
PWC UK Economic Outlook July 2019⁸ found that rental affordability for public sector employees is particularly acute within the London area, and the South East of England faring the worst. The report suggested that Nurses' wages would need to increase by approximately £10,000 per annum to be considered affordable in London. It also highlights a specific issue with young people aged 25–34-year-olds now disproportionately less likely to purchase a property with a mortgage and 'more than twice as likely to rent privately'. The same report also suggests that in London, tenants aged 22-29 years on average now have to spend over half (53%) of their incomes on private rents. The emerging consensus is that for housing costs to be affordable the percentage of income spent on rents should be around 30-33%.

It is clear that pressure on rents and affordable homes is driven by the lack of supply. Research by APSE and the TCPA found that alongside existing housing waiting lists a further 159,000 new households were created in England in 2018-2019, which as a minimum would need 340,000 new homes each year to have any chance of housing supply meeting needs. In 2018-2019 new supply reached just 241,000, which also includes conversions and changes of use on existing properties.

1.5 Table 1 overleaf illustrates the decline in local authority housing provisions and the growth in the Private Rented Sector whilst at the same time the relative stagnation of homeownership.

7 Homes England Statistical; Dataset to December 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/941829/Housing_Statistics_December_2020.pdf

8 PWC UK Economic Outlook July 2019 **Special Features on UK Housing Market** available at <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/ukeyo/ukeyo-july2019.pdf>



Government datasets Dwelling stock by type updated May 2020⁹

1.5 Housing as an equalities issue

Many investigative reports have found access to housing is particularly difficult for those in receipt of benefits, including in-work benefits and this has been a particular problem for single parents. Emerging research however suggests that this is now a much broader equalities issue.

New research by Shelter ‘Denied the right to a safe home’¹⁰ also exposes the overall equalities impact of unmet housing need. Its report based on a detailed survey of 13,000 respondents, making it one of the largest studies ever on experiences of housing need, suggests that the impact of the housing crisis is felt more acutely by disabled people, BAME people as well as single parents.

Survey responses found that of those impacted by the housing emergency 58% of respondents were single parent households, 50% were households with incomes below £20,000 per annum, a further 54% states that they were limited a lot by their disability, 56% of Black and 49% of Asian respondents reported being impacted by housing need and 40% of gay or lesbian and 49% of bisexual respondents had been adversely affected by the housing crisis.

It is therefore clear that those in housing need are not a homogenous group. Housing need falls unequally within society, impacting on different groups and raising serious concerns about access to housing and the causes of such inequalities in finding a safe secure place to live.

⁹ Statistical data set by stock type May 2020 Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

¹⁰ ‘Denied the Right to a Safe Home’ (2021) Published by Shelter available at https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnnpn0s/415ro3YWRxflE7sXqW11bO/a1a94184ab52ed3b5a800ab60603bc60/Shelter_Denied_the_right_to_a_safe_home_Report.pdf

Chapter 2: Housing supply and public sector workers

2.1 Is there a case for key worker housing?

The COVID-19 pandemic has re-established an acknowledgement of the value of 'key workers'. However, it has also recalibrated who is regarded as a 'key worker'. Past limitations of definitions of 'key worker' have been evidenced by housing allocation policies; for example, policies that tend to be restricted to nurses and other health workers or teachers, and occasionally police officers. As a general finding, local government 'key workers' are usually excluded from the priority allocations as are many other public service workers including non-teaching staff in education, care workers, emergency services support staff, and many others.

However, is there an argument to expand 'key worker' definitions? Or is this of itself iniquitous? During COVID-19 those considered 'key workers' went well beyond the obvious public sector workers and has included workers in logistics, drivers, retail, food production, and numerous other hidden 'key workers' not to mention less high-profile public-sector job roles such as refuse collectors and maintenance workers.

These changing or re-appraised dynamics of what is considered critical to a functioning economy, therefore, reopens the debate as to key workers and housing need. Certainly, UNISON would not be arguing that a retail worker in a supermarket is any less entitled to an affordable and secure place to live than a person who happens to be employed in the public sector. However, the lack of affordable homes and how this may impact the delivery of key public services should be considered.

2.2 'Key worker' housing as a public policy issue

Although in the past there has been some tacit commitment to key worker housing policies, such measures have fallen short of assisting all 'key workers'. In reality, such policies tended to fail because the definition of public sector workers as 'key workers' was too narrowly defined. Many public sector workers in need of an affordable home to rent fell outside of the defined categories of teachers, social workers, and police but equally were unable to access social homes to rent. As average house prices have risen, year on year, modestly paid public sector workers were nevertheless unable to access social homes for rent, but for many public sector workers earnings in reality were (and still are) too low to access private rented homes or mortgage products. As illustrated in Chapter 1, a nurse would need to earn £10,000 more than the current pay rates to afford a home in London. The average care-worker in domiciliary or residential care earned just £8.50 an hour with 73% earning less than the real living wage¹¹. A refuse collector's median salary is cited as between £18,000 to £21,000 and in places like London, even with weighting allowances, affordability prevents workers from being able to live near where they work.

11 Skills for Care Workforce-data intelligence <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/Pay-rates.aspx>

This ongoing situation has left many public sector workers, like other workers, facing unpalatable choices including a long commute to work, to be able to afford a home in which to live. With private rent levels so high many find that they are unable to save to move. Young workers and older single people, in particular, are put in a position where they are required to find housing with others in a similar situation; this has led to private sector landlords seeing an opportunity to maximise rent yields by converting much needed family sized homes into houses of multiple occupation (HMOs), which are often in sub-standard conditions. According to Inside Housing¹² there has been a 20% growth in HMOs since 2012 /2013 to 2020 with an estimated 429,065 growing to 515,862.

For public sector employers, this could signify a risk of workers leaving low paid jobs in the public sector to seek improved wages outside of the public sector. The problem is more acute in London and this has been the case for many years. Indeed, many would argue that this lack of attention to affordable homes for public sector workers has a direct impact on delivering against key policy pledges of governments of all persuasions; with commitments to increase health staff, police, teachers, and teaching assistants, and improve outcomes in health and wellbeing, community safety and education.

Attempts to tackle housing for key workers have ebbed and waned over the last two decades. The Labour Government in 2002 introduced the 'Starter Home Initiative' with a £250M funding pot to allow key workers to access £10,000 equity loans to enable them to part-own new homes. The scheme however was unsuccessful and was criticised for being a lottery, with essentially 200,000 first time buyers being presented with the opportunity to purchase a property at 20% discount, which were then able to be sold at full market value, in addition to this, the bidders to access funds in the main were drawn from social landlords. The policy was relatively small scale in addressing the numbers of affordable new homes, delivering just 9,000 new homes and it failed to keep pace with rapidly rising house prices.

The successor to the 2002 scheme again introduced by the Labour Government in 2004 was a new initiative called the 'Key Worker Living Programme'. This time the funding pot was increased with £690M of funds available. Whilst eligibility to access the scheme was expanded in response to criticisms of the earlier scheme, to include for example prison and probation workers and fire-fighters, it was met with similar difficulties to the predecessor scheme. Rising house prices and the scheme structure meant its ambitions of access to affordable homes for key workers became frustrated. Of course, the equity loans, provided to support key workers purchasing properties have to be repaid. In these schemes typically the repayment is linked to the proportionate value of the property when it is sold. In a market where the value of property rapidly increases, the 'winners' in the scheme were certainly not the key workers.

Labour was not the only government administration to try and tackle housing need amongst workers through tinkering with existing market mechanisms. The commonality of government approaches has not been to address the under-supply of housing, which generally inflates house prices, and rents, making them less affordable to all workers – but instead plugs the gap in affordability with specific grants and loans. These mechanisms do little to address the fundamental problems of housing supply and its links to creating the very market conditions that exacerbate the crisis in housing need.

In recent years, Conservative governments have led numerous initiatives to direct lower paid workers onto affordability schemes, attempting to bridge the gap in homeownership, due to a recognition of house

12 Inside Housing. 28 May 2020 Article by Peter Apps Available at <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/going-to-the-kitchen-is-scary-lockdown-puts-shared-rented-housing-in-the-spotlight-66416>

price inflation taking homeownership further away from people, especially first-time buyers. However, the emphasis on homeownership has led to further neglect in policies to support social housing for rent. Whilst £2.1 billion was the initial investment in affordable housing under Theresa May's administration, this was not matched by funding directly into local councils to kick start social rent programmes. In 2020, and following the initial assessments of the impact of COVID-19, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced a further pot of £12.2 billion.¹³ However, again the emphasis is on homeownership and affordable purchasing, although the announcement was accompanied by a reference that money would be available for social housing. It is too early to assess whether any positive impact will be felt from this latest initiative.

Therefore, the demands for affordable key worker housing remains whilst the crisis in affordable homes for rent continues to grow. A recent report published by the Policy Exchange 'Revitalising Key Worker Housing'¹⁴ found there is no longer any form of dedicated key worker housing programme. Any semblance of key worker housing policies has in effect been rolled into other affordable housing schemes with an attempt to engage these workers in schemes to purchase rather than rent properties, such as equity loans and shared ownership schemes. Indeed, within these schemes, there is no differentiation between key workers and others applying. The Policy Exchange report concludes that unless the property market in the South East goes into decline there will be no improved access to accommodation in that area for key workers.

Whilst some housing associations continue to offer homes for key workers as a priority category these appear to be limited and narrowly defined. The criteria would not cover the refuse worker on £18,000 per annum or the care worker earning less than the National Living Wage, yet such workers are vital to local communities and local public services.

2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework and 'Essential Local Workers'

The revised National Planning Policy Framework¹⁵ (NPPF for England) recognises that 'essential local workers' should be beneficiaries of new homes built as part of affordable housing obligations. These 'obligations' are conditions that developers must meet when making a residential scheme 'acceptable'. The NPPF defines 'essential local workers' as public sector employees providing frontline services in areas including health, education and community safety and can include NHS staff, teachers, police, firefighters, military personnel, social care, and childcare workers. However, this is a relatively narrow definition as identified, given experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are concerns that this definition does not truly reflect the value of a whole spectrum of other workers. In any event the efficacy of any obligations, stemming from the weakened planning system in England, can only realistically be taken at face value.

13 MHCLG Press release: Jenrick unveils huge £12 billion boost for affordable homes <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jenrick-unveils-huge-12-billion-boost-for-affordable-homes>

14 Revitalising Key Worker Housing Jack Airey and Sir Robin Wales Published by the Policy Exchange <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Revitalising-Key-worker-Housing.pdf>

15 National Planning Policy Framework https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

However, despite its limitations, some authorities have adopted policies to support affordable housing for local workers through their Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents. This has also helped to steer the development of housing allocation policies that better reflect housing need. In one authority, Sevenoaks, a survey¹⁶ was conducted amongst local employers to establish if housing need had an impact on local businesses. That survey found the lack of affordable housing is by far the highest impact area of concern for respondent local businesses, with 64% indicating that it has the highest impact and a further 17% stating it has the next highest level of impact; these results were closely followed by concerns on travel costs and transport times to work. Such strategies, allowing for the development of justifiable supplementary planning documents, should enable local planning authorities to further prioritise affordable housing in their local plan.

2.4 Housing for workers and public sector pay. Why does pay matter to housing need?

One of the determinants of affordability in housing is the wages people earn to meet rent or mortgage repayments. An accepted definition of this is where housing costs are more than 30% of income, this is judged to making housing costs unaffordable. The Smith Institute Affordable Housing Commission report¹⁷ recommends that rent or mortgage repayments should not be more than 33% of earnings.

There is a direct link between increased housing poverty and the growth in the private rented sector, which has doubled since 2000 as there is no effective regulation on rent prices within the private rented sector. A further impact on housing costs has been the Local Housing Allowance or LHA; this is the rate used to work out how much Universal Credit or Housing Benefit a person can claim if they rent from a private landlord. However, in 2016 a four-year freeze was imposed and subsequent changes to how it is calculated. A Shelter Briefing: ‘Westminster Hall Debate on Local Housing Allowance and Homelessness’¹⁸ found that a staggering 97% of areas in England, will find people who will experience a shortfall between their rent and Local Housing Allowance (in the bottom 30th percentile of local rents). For those in receipt of in-work benefits, this simply means that a higher proportion of their earnings must go to top up rent payments.

These changes, taken with other issues such as the under-occupation penalty (otherwise known as the ‘bedroom tax’), for many households already in poverty, have exacerbated the affordability gap between earnings and the percentage of those earnings which must be spent on housing. Even in the social rented sector rents have increased beyond earnings. This does not of course just impact on public sector workers but across all workers who face this affordability gap created by the increased

16 Employer Survey https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1029/survey_of_employers_housing_needs

17 Making Housing Affordable Again – final report of the Affordable Housing Commission. Published by the Smith Institute available at <https://www.smith-institute.org.uk/2020/07/20/making-housing-affordable-again-final-report-of-the-affordable-housing-commission/>

18 A Shelter Briefing: ‘Westminster Hall Debate on Local Housing Allowance and Homelessness’ https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnnpn0s/4Ehd4bgEjOrTnm2HDGqcbC/0f3efd8340050906129e-6f9e7acee0de/LHA_and_homelessness.pdf

percentage of earnings that must go towards meeting housing costs. Rent increases, freezes or real term cuts to housing related benefits and welfare, coupled with low wages, is increasing those living in housing poverty and stretching still further the proportion of household income that is spent on housing.

2.5 Earnings and pay in the public and private sectors

A recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) study¹⁹ on public and private sector earnings (2019) explored the so-called public-sector premium. It took into account a range of factors which are used to calculate pay differences but it is clear that some disparities arise from the treatment of pensions (most likely to be taken up in public sector jobs) and the deterioration in employer pension schemes in the private sector, alongside consideration of things such as salary sacrifice schemes and the use of company cars or private health insurance, which is generally not a consideration in the public sector. Nevertheless, the study found a deterioration in public sector earnings from 2011 onwards to 2019. Although public sector pay rises increased at a marginally higher rate in 2019/2020 over the past ten years, public sector pay has, on average, risen more slowly than the private sector. When inflation is taken into account there is a strong argument that this equates to a pay cut, not just a pay freeze, across many public sector occupations. This is not limited to low-earning jobs, in fact there is a distinction drawn by the ONS on some highly skilled knowledge jobs where in fact, there is a significant difference, with lower earnings in the public sector. However, on a like for like basis there is no visible 'pay premium' in jobs such as care workers.

In any event, the ONS data is telling us that pay rises across both the public and private sector, have been relatively suppressed. However, other financial pressures continue with the increasing costs for fuel, food, and housing.

The reason this matters is due to the reliance by the public on the delivery of public services. If workers are unable to live in the area in which those services are needed this will inevitably impact on the ability of public sector bodies to deliver core services such as health and social care, education services, or environmental services; all of which the public rely upon. The suppression of public sector wages, therefore, adds to the affordability gap in housing terms. Lower wages equate to a higher proportion of that wage being spent on meeting housing need. In areas of critical housing need, particularly in London and the South East of England, public sector workers earnings are woefully below the levels needed to buy or rent a decent home close to the place in which they work.

In pockets of the UK house prices are outstripping earnings. For example, in Cornwall, the median house price is more than eight times the median salary. According to ONS data, this shows that the median house price was £236,000 and the median annual salary £27,223 in 2020 in Cornwall. This means that local people need 8.67 times their salary to purchase a home. In some areas, the situation is even worse. For example, in Cambridge, Brentwood, Stratford-on-Avon, Daventry, and Harrogate, the affordability ratio is even worse with people living in Epping Forest needing 12.78 times their salary to afford a home in which to live.

19 Public and private sector earnings: 2019 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/publicandprivatesectorearnings/2019>

2.6 Is there a case for a ‘Living Rent’?

Given the gap between earnings and housing costs, which is particularly acute in the private rented sector, although increasingly also an issue given the welfare cuts in the social rented sector, a concept of a ‘Living Rent’ has developed. This ‘living rent’ model has already been adopted by some housing providers.

‘Renting Beyond Their Means? The Role of Living Rent in Addressing Housing Affordability’²⁰ is an Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report which explores this issue in some detail. Key to its findings is that as ‘affordability’ itself is highly variable between different regions, countries, and areas, any living rent model should allow for flexibility to consider these factors but essentially set a core rent as affordable at 28% of earnings.

The methodology suggested in the IPPR report identifies a core methodology which draws upon earnings data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) against information on sales and lettings, combining this with OECD-modified equivalence scales to calculate different rents which also considers household size and composition – for example, families, single person households and so on. This methodology allows rents to be applied on a local authority area basis.

Whilst there are some complexities with the concept of a living rent, such as tracking earnings and eligibility, these barriers are already in operation for more traditional means of income support, including Universal Credit and other in-work benefits.

The IPPR report argues that the approach of a living rent would bring about immediate relief to those living in effective rent poverty by linking rent to affordability based on earnings. There is arguably a strong case for some immediate consideration of this as an approach to the rapid amelioration of rent poverty, since a change to a living rent model may be quicker to achieve than addressing the supply side issues of social housing, and the lag of wages, which both contribute to the yawning gap in affordable rents.

20 ‘Renting Beyond Their Means? The Role of Living Rent in Addressing Housing Affordability’ IPPR (2020) Webb, J., Murphy, L. Jonathan Webb Available at <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-07/renting-beyond-their-means-june20.pdf>

Chapter 3: How can we respond to housing needs?

3.1 Introduction

It is clear that housing need is a driver for the health and wellbeing of residents, families, and communities. Poor housing is linked to poorer health outcomes, housing costs impact adversely on personal finances and adversely impact on mental health. From a family perspective, this leads to poor outcomes in education for children and young people. However, there is no one answer to responding to housing need. As a complex issue, there are a multiplicity of responses to the issues of housing needs.

3.2 Obstacles to new build homes

In part, the sluggish response to the housing crisis is driven by several factors. Despite the need for new homes, some areas face serious opposition to new build homes. This can genuinely be about the ability for local infrastructure to cope but sometimes this can spill into opposition around protectionism for local area aesthetics or even house prices (falsely inflated by shortages of supply).

The UK also faces several obstacles in building new homes in terms of supply, planning restrictions, areas of special designation as well as a shortage of materials, and skilled people, availability of land and the role of developers.

3.2.1 Supply

A core determinant of house price and rent inflation is lack of supply. Whilst a lack of sufficient housing supply is not only to the determinant of housing need it is widely accepted as a major, if not the single most important reason, for the growth in unmet housing needs.

In post-war Britain, it was commonplace for political parties to compete on the number of new homes they would build. This peaked in the 1960s where record numbers of homes, in excess of 400,000 a year, being built. In fact, the highest volume of new council housing came under a Conservative Government. However, this was followed by a sharp decline falling below 150,000 in the 1990s, 2000s, and beyond with 2012-2013 recording just 124,000 new properties. Signs of improvement are however encouraging with 240,000 new homes being built in 2018-19, although official data also records that 12% of these new properties are due to conversions and change of use on existing buildings. This represents around 28,800 of those units. Of the new homes built just 57,485 were classed as affordable homes (in England). Whilst this was a 22% increase on the previous year, 66 per cent of new affordable homes in 2018-19 were for rent with the remainder for sale, and the volume of local authority build was just 11%.

Nevertheless, the acknowledged need to build around 340,000 new homes each year is still not being realised. Recent governments have recognised the value of addressing housing supply as a core tool in tackling the lack of housing and homelessness. For example, in 2015, the Government of David Cameron set out to deliver a net increase in housing stock of 1 million new homes but the House of

Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs rejected this idea because it did not take into account the backlog of housing need. As discussed previously the committee also suggested that whilst an even bigger number of new homes was needed, it was questionable as to whether the figure, of one million new homes, was of itself achievable.

Pledges on the volume of new homes were also featured in the 2017 Conservative Party manifesto with a specific pledge to deliver half a million new homes by the end of 2022. With the COVID-19 pandemic, targets on new homes by 2022 have now been called into question.

3.2.2 Green Belt land and planning

Whilst most people would agree that there are significant health benefits to ensuring good quality green open spaces, and preventing the over-development of areas, into concrete urban sprawl, there is also a balance of need for new homes.

Local planning authorities (LPA) (essentially councils with planning responsibilities) must follow the National Planning Policy Framework²¹ (NPPF) which requires them, to develop and formally adopt Local Plans. Within these Local Plans, Green Belt 'boundaries' are established. Although such plans can be altered as part of planning review processes the NPPF restricts local planning authorities from changing Green Belt boundaries unless there are exceptional circumstances. The guidance also encourages local planning authorities to consider brownfield sites first; these are sites that have been used for other purposes, such as industrial sites, that may be capable of being re-used as housing land, for example following land surveys to ensure it is safe to do so.

The thrust of the NPPF in relation to Green Belt is set out in Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework which demands that there should be 'exceptional circumstances' before Green Belt boundaries are changed by LPAs. It also makes reference to 'very special circumstances'. Therefore, this protection of the Green Belt as an overriding consideration can be problematic in areas where opportunities for new housing are limited without expanding into Green Belt. Some have also questioned how the Green Belt is defined. Green Belt need not be sweeping expanses of beautiful countryside, as it is often perceived, but could be nearer to scrubland that some would argue might benefit local communities by development being allowed. There are also some opportunities for LPAs to offset building on Green Belt by showing how a development could improve environmental quality or indeed access to other Green Belt land. Nevertheless, for local authorities seeking to secure more homes, navigating through Green Belt restrictions can prove to be complex and often create tensions with local communities with differing interests. That being said, according to Peter Brett for the Local Government Association's (LGA) Planning Advisory Service²², just 13% of England is designated Green Belt so it is only part of the problem in getting enough new homes.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of accessible public realm, and called into question neighbourhood design and planning issues. The prevention of urban sprawl, and

21 National Planning Policy Framework https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

22 Brett, P. Planning Advisory Service, LGA 'Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt' <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/green-belt-244.pdf>

more localised access to services, shops and facilities, could provide for a more systematic approach to developing brownfield sites first but in a way which supports climate change mitigation and adaptation.

3.2.3 Is planning the cause of delays in building new homes?

The LGA recently found that whilst planning permission had been granted by councils to build 2,782,300 new homes since 2010/11, just 1,627,730 have been built over the same period despite nine in ten planning applications being approved. To remedy this the LGA is calling for new legislation to enable local councils to charge developers the full rate of council tax on unbuilt homes when planning permission expires. This would discourage developers from holding on to land without taking forward the promised new developments.

Similarly, within Scotland, the Scottish Government Response²³ to consultation on planning changes reported that planning delays were not the root cause of delays in housebuilding within Scotland. There are a range of other factors impacting on the delivery of new homes including the capacity of the industry, access to finance by purchasers and land controlled by non-developers or plans that were insufficient for effective house building.

Within Wales, changes to the planning system put in place by the Welsh Government in March 2020 allows all new developments to be identified through the plan-making process. In place of a five-year supply of housing land, the changes mean that LPAs will monitor housing delivery against LDP housing trajectories.

3.2.4 Land prices, land supply and private developers

Across the UK the number of homes built by local councils, or within the not-for-profit housing sector, has been in steep decline over decades; though there is an ever improving picture in Scotland, with councils returning at pace to build new council homes, and a renewed commitment in Wales to future council housing. Conversely, the marked increase in private developers or for-profit providers has been marked by a steep increase in the market share of those companies seeking to build or rent homes at a profit.

In terms of land supply, this is particularly acute in considering affordable homes to buy or rent. The price of land increases when planning permission is assured. Land without planning permission is a risky business for developers which means land with planning permission comes at a premium. Land prices can therefore impact the size and quality of new homes – more houses may equal more profit if built on smaller, and hence cheaper, land.

In a hard-hitting report in 2018, the New Economics Foundation in their research ‘What lies beneath: How to fix the broken land system at the heart of our housing crisis’²⁴ found a direct correlation between land prices and affordability. It found that in areas where land prices were high average rents swallowed up to three quarters of ordinary households’ pre-tax income; they compared this to areas with low land

23 Scottish Planning Policy – finalised amendments: December 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-planning-policy-finalised-amendments-december-2020/pages/4/>

24 ‘What lies beneath: How to fix the broken land system at the heart of our housing crisis’ <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/what-lies-beneath.pdf>

prices where average rents were at 20% of pre-tax income. The same report also found that in areas with the top 10% of local authorities in terms of land values this accounted for 73% of households in temporary accommodation. Land values is, therefore, a significant contributor to house price and rent affordability, with pockets of the UK simply unaffordable to renters and to those wishing to buy a home.

The land price driven market means that it is controlled by speculators who can hold on to the land until it reaches a price they desire, with few powers for local authorities to intervene or force through the building of homes. A recommendation from the New Economics Foundation, which enjoys support, is that a way of controlling land prices and increasing the supply of land for house building is to ensure that instead of public bodies selling off land, at the maximum possible price that can be achieved (which they are otherwise obliged to do should they choose to sell land) the land should be used for house-building to generate a public sector land bank to be developed quickly and at scale into new homes.

3.2.5 Building supplies

Concern over the availability of materials to build new homes is not a new issue but many would argue that two factors are now impacting more severely on supply-side issues. First of all, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an increase in pent-up demand as restrictions have lifted and specific exemptions came into play to subsequently allow building to continue. Second the impact of Brexit, whilst yet to be fully assessed, has at least anecdotally evidenced some supply side issues of delays to material supplies and price rises in essential products such as cement and plaster board.

According to the Construction Products Association, the UK is facing full order books on construction contracts which is, in turn, putting increased pressure on the product supply chain. Although most products are available, certain materials, used in the construction of new homes are facing delays. This includes products such as timber, roof tiles, and roofing membranes, and raw materials stemming from global demand, which is also increasing prices such as steel products and galvanised steel. All of this may mean that longer lead-in times are needed on new developments.

A further issue that arguably first arose in 2014/2015 is a shortage of bricks. This problem of a key material shortage is in part blamed on a shortfall between UK manufacturers coping with demand, leaving a gap in supplies, which must be made up by imports. The Federation of Master Builders estimated that this amounts to around 4,000 projects being delayed. The problem is made more severe for small-medium sized developers, who are unable to stockpile materials, compared to larger house builders.

However, the Brick Development Association has recently highlighted a growth in domestic UK brick production – which is also supported by ONS data – which suggests domestic brick manufacturing for March 2019 showed a 6.4% rise over the same month in 2018 and a 7.8% increase on a rolling 12-month comparison to the preceding period. In addition to this new UK based factories have been developed and mothballed production facilities brought back into use, although it is a sluggish process to bring such plants back up into full production.

A further barrier to new homes is a recognised shortage in construction skills. When councils operated their own house building programmes, alongside repairs and maintenance services, this was often accompanied by apprenticeships programmes, taking on school leavers, with training in carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing, and electrical works. This approach whilst not the only route to develop construction skills nevertheless provided a sizeable contribution to construction skills across the UK. The decline in direct building by local councils and the fragmentation of housing maintenance and repairs, with the development of ALMOS and housing associations models of delivery, has contributed to breaking this

link between the role of councils in anchoring construction apprenticeships within local economies.

The Construction Industry Training Board Nation Plan for England ²⁵ published in March 2021, provides a useful insight into how the construction industry itself intends to respond. However, it is clear that the impact of COVID-19 has already had a detrimental effect on construction workers and apprenticeships. The CITB report found 28% of employers were still using the furlough scheme in England, with 23% in Scotland and 14% in Wales. Further to this 28% of construction companies in England anticipate possible future redundancies. COVID-19 is also having an impact on apprenticeships with reports that the 2020/21 intake of apprentices is at just 70% of the pre-COVID levels, although, 15% of employers on a Great Britain basis were also looking to start an apprenticeship in March 2021.

When it comes to overall recruitment, the CITB figures suggest that to keep pace with demand, the recruitment of construction workers would need to increase by nearly 34,000 each year. This is coupled with an ageing demographic with more than 20% of construction workers over 50 years old and 15% over 60. These ageing workers are not being replaced by younger workers where construction or manual work, in general, is seemingly unattractive in a digital age. Some reports suggest that job searches for construction are at just 3% amongst job-seekers in the 18-24 years category. Questions also remain about the long-term impact of Brexit within an industry that has heavily relied upon European skilled workers filling construction jobs. Whilst it is probably too early to make any judgements on overall numbers this will potentially leave an even bigger skills gap, if, as expected, the residency and worker rights of Europeans are eroded or made complex. There is also a lack of workforce diversity, with women in particular underrepresented in the construction industry.

3.3. Responding to the challenges to meet housing needs

What is clear from the identifiable barriers to building new homes is that there is no one answer. Even if land supply and planning permissions are in place there are still potential barriers to build-out with skills and materials shortages.

Equally the developer-led markets effectively control the price of new homes, whether for sale or rent. In turn, the developer-led system does not necessarily ensure that new homes are built where needed, by workers or by employers for that matter. This is manifested in chronic over-pricing in London and the South East and poor quality in many areas, including rural areas of the UK.

Given the inadequacies of the current system, there is a clear need for radical and immediate action on housing and this, it is argued, should involve local authorities at the heart of that new approach.

25 CITB Nation Plan for England March 2021 <https://www.citb.co.uk/media/dujk0big/nation-plan-2021-22-england.pdf>

Chapter 4: The role of local authorities in housing

4.1 An historic context to local authority involvement in housing delivery

Following the Second World War, and endeavours to rebuild Britain, political parties were proud to compete on the numbers of new homes that they would build during their term of office. There was a clear recognition that housing was central to so many other public policy issues, from health and education, to the alleviation of poverty and the ability to find employment. Mass slum clearance programmes also followed to improve the quality of the housing stock.

According to McAdam (2019) in the 35 years after the Second World War, local authorities and housing associations built 4.4 million social homes. However, this was accompanied by the ‘wholesale demolition of entire neighbourhoods’ which removed around ‘1.48 million houses from the built environment, and in doing so displaced over 3.5 million people from their homes and established community networks’²⁶.

New housing estates on a grand scale emerged across post-war Britain. Many were successful but other social housing schemes less so. Amongst the less successful was the failure of design and planning in mass tower blocks built in the 1960s and into the 1970s. Accordingly to Dunleavy (1978)²⁷ around 440,000 new high-rise flats were built for council tenants between 1945 and 1975. Spurred on by a progressive height subsidy introduced by the Conservative Government, keen to protect suburban areas, the growth in high-rise ‘solutions’ was driven by the aims of income from the ‘height’ subsidy, re-housing the masses of families who had been displaced from their own homes, or those belonging to social landlord’s, compulsory purchased, and a drive for industrial scale construction firms to drive up lagging house-building. Whilst initial designs were of brick construction, good spatial standards and with double staircases, the latter and cheaper designs were of poorer construction, with singles staircases, lifts unable to take furniture, let alone a coffin, and used for housing families, which had never been the original intention. The now sadly infamous Grenfell Tower was built in 1974.

The purpose of raising these conflicting visions of social housing is to explore the context of the decline in the role of local authorities in house building. The shared vision of social housing was in the main swept away by the end of the post-war consensus. The emergence of the Thatcher vision of a ‘home-owning’ democracy and the political success of ‘Right to Buy’ have all contributed to the decline in direct council housing. The vandalism and poor quality associated with high-rise blocks, and the characteristic breakdown of settled communities, who were forced into new accommodation following slum clearance programmes, all contributed to a narrative that social housing was the preserve of those unable to get on in life – rather than its true intention of providing a home for anyone who needed it.

26 McAdam, Katie (2019) Rubbish, Rubble and Rodents: Post-War Slum Clearance and the Resident Experience of Demolition in Salford. Available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/35133/>

27 Dunleavy, P. (1978). The politics of high-rise housing in Britain [PhD thesis]. University of Oxford.

A further consideration of council housing quality is however more positive than the high-rise experience. The adoption of the Parker Morris standards, drawn up by a committee of the same name, provided a highly influential report on the standards of space needed for functional living; the standards considered how to future proof homes, looking at the furniture that a typical dwelling would need to function as a home, and how that home would be used. Many councils adopted these standards long before they were actually obliged to follow them. This set high-quality standards both in the construction and design of council properties. The Local Government Planning and Land Act of 1980²⁸ introduced by the Conservative Government effectively ended these standards in a bid to save money.

In spite of the positive aspects of the Parker Morris standards the experience of high-rise blocks, and the narrative of a need to save ‘public money’ spent on housing, arguably made it easier for administrations to push the case for council housing to become arms-length to local councils.

4.2 Fragmentation of social housing

The role of local government in council housing was further undermined by the advent of both large and small voluntary transfers of housing stock to different providers, most often social landlords in the form of Housing Associations. The Housing Act 1985 facilitated a range of changes in housing provision and notably introduced the ‘Right to Buy’ alongside the ability, with a ballot of tenants, to transfer council housing to housing associations.

The arguments of better management in the private or not-for-profit sector to facilitate improvements to council homes or to help build new homes were far from settled. Indeed, many campaign groups and trade unions, including UNISON, opposed these moves. However, the trajectory of social housing continued away from local authority provision with the introduction of the ‘Decent Homes Standard’. This pledge – a target by the Blair Government to raise a third of homes to the new standards of a ‘Decent Home’ between 2001 and 2004, subsequently followed by all social housing by 2010 – was caveated by an initial requirement to transfer housing stock away from the local authority, and then a requirement that delivery of the improvements must be placed at arms-length to the local authority, albeit the stock remained ‘council stock.’ The development of ALMOs became an almost certain result of Decent Homes funding filtering through to councils. Whilst it was intended that ALMO’s would be special purpose vehicles, to deliver the decent homes programme, many simply became embedded as the model of housing management and delivery; though it is worthy of note that in recent years a number of ALMOs are now being disestablished, with the functions returning back to local councils.

This stripping of direct control over the management, improvement programmes, and consequentially repairs and maintenance of council housing has led to a number of outcomes: –

- A depletion of stock through Right to Buy sales with a subsequential failure to replace the stock lost to such sales
- A limitation on funding to enable new build council housing
- Demolition’s policies in stock areas where the cost of improvements was too prohibitive
- A loss of stock levels and/or direct management of stock to social landlords and Housing Associations
- A growth in the reliance on private providers to meet housing needs

28 The Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/65/contents>

What this means in terms of social housing supply is that whilst in 1980 just a paltry 94,140 homes were built, within just three years this had halved again to just over 44,000 new social homes. By 2018/19, according to the House of Commons, Housing Communities and Local Government Select Committee²⁹ just 6,287 new social homes were built. Delivering nowhere near enough homes for 1.1 million people who remain on social housing waiting lists.

These poor outcomes support the case for direct local authority delivery of social housing. The following sections, therefore, explore what can be achieved by local councils directly delivering social housing.

4.3 What can be achieved by local councils that can't be delivered through other providers?

Generally, councils who are also planning authorities must develop a local plan, to ensure enough homes are available to meet local need. As we have already established this is often frustrated by a range of factors. However, it also places councils in a good position of knowledge on the housing assets within their area. This information will typically allow councils to have knowledge of housing stock by type and tenure and enable the local council to calculate future need. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England, and planning practice guidance, provides a means to identify housing need, including taking into consideration for example needs by age group, type of household, size of household, tenure, and any special requirements, such as, the housing needs of people with disabilities. Local councils are therefore arguably in a strong position of local knowledge to identify and meet gaps in housing provision.

Local councils are often considered anchor institutions within local economies. In other words, they 'stay put' and are not going to go out of business or move away from local areas. This gives councils a very powerful role in how they behave to positively influence local outcomes. For example: –

- Whilst a private developer may leave an area once a housing development is completed, the local council as a housing provider (and as we see from the case studies often acting as a 'lead developer') has an ongoing interest in the local area.
- Local councils are democratically accountable at a local level providing the opportunity for joined-up thinking on public policy issues, for example ensuring housing is suitable for older people supporting outcomes in adult social care; ensuring good quality housing for families which supports both children and their families and better educational outcomes.
- The role of local councils is also vital in addressing climate change issues. With energy use in UK households contributing to 14% of all UK emissions, the role of the local authority in acting to reduce household emissions is vital.
- The local council will want to positively use local supply chains and encourage the growth of jobs, skills, and apprenticeships at a local area level

Therefore, right across the 'messy' public policy issues and the stated desire across UK-wide governments to 'level up' left behind communities, the role of decent housing may be considered a vital component.

²⁹ House of Commons, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 'Building more social housing' Third Report of Session 2019–21

4.4 Local councils acting as lead developers and house-builders

Many local councils have struggled to meet housing needs at a local level through market-led models of delivery. Despite planning consents being given councils often find that they have little by way of powers to force the promised new build homes, and, in any event, are often frustrated by the low volume of delivery of affordable homes for rent or to buy.

This situation has led to a large number of local authorities taking the role of lead developer and in some cases, lead builder, of new homes for affordable rent or sale. In 'Local authority direct provision of housing'³⁰, a report for the National Planning Forum and the Royal Town Planning Institute, Professor Janice Morphet, and Dr Ben Clifford found that in 2017 alone local councils created 30 housing companies, allowing them to self-develop new homes.

The report also found that 65% of local authorities are directly engaged in housing delivery. In some councils this activity was found to be through using General Funds, taking advantage of changes to HRA (Housing Revenue Account) rules, entering into joint ventures with developers to enable them to influence the types of new homes being delivered in local areas, and in some cases identifying land for housing use. In addition, some councils were able to provide loans to enable other bodies to build new homes, or bring back into use homes that had otherwise been abandoned, and no longer used for housing.

APSE research in 2017 'Building homes, creating communities: Ensuring councils provide innovative solutions to meeting housing need'³¹ similarly found widespread local authority self-development on new homes including in Birmingham City Council, London Borough of Lambeth, Midlothian Council, Oxford City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Many now estimate that at least two-thirds of councils have some direct role in delivering new homes. The benefits of direct involvement are found in different outcomes in different areas. For example: –

Shaping markets – whilst private developers may remain interested in returns on investments, for local councils influencing housing developments is more nuanced; for example, ensuring new homes are built to attract families to stay within an area or retain the skills needed in local economies by ensuring graduates from local universities do not leave areas.

Shaping local markets to attract and retain talent can be particularly challenging, especially in rural areas. Between 2017 and 2022 The Highland Council agreed a plan to deliver 500 new affordable homes every year. Included within these strategic goals its stated aim was to make the council area an attractive place and to 'encourage younger residents to stay there'. Its latest plan³² – including the Strategic Housing

30 Morphet (J), Clifford, (B), (2017) 'Local authority direct provision of housing', a report for the National Planning Forum and the Royal Town Planning Institute available at <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1891/localauthoritydirectprovisionofhousing2017.pdf>

31 APSE (2017) 'Building homes, creating communities: Ensuring councils provide innovative solutions to meeting housing need' Available at [https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/assets/File/Building%20Homes%20\(web\).pdf](https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/assets/File/Building%20Homes%20(web).pdf)

32 https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/76050/item_14_strategic_housing_investment_plan

Investment Plan which pulls together the various streams of funding and partnership working, including with the Scottish Government – identifies its own direct role as a housing developer. The Highland Council also identifies as part of its strategic role the use of its own land and assets, particularly in areas where there are commercial viability issues for new homes.

Meeting the needs of older people – within an ageing UK population, local councils can help to ensure housing meets newer demands, such as smaller properties for downsizing, or supported housing developments, to enable older people to remain living independently for longer.

Essex County Council acted as a coordinator with its district councils to assess the need for more independent living units and costed the risk of older people being placed in ‘traditional care’ settings due to lack of available homes in supported living environments. This included exploring the cost differential between supporting an older person with domiciliary care, in an independent setting, as opposed to an older person going into a more expensive residential care option. As well as sourcing pipeline projects working across a range of partners, Essex County Council also made available sites in its ownership, which it identified as land which was surplus to its requirements, and helped to broker land assembly arrangements, with an ambition to deliver 1800 new units.

Homelessness responsibilities – making sure there are enough homes, particularly homes for single people, is critical to tackling homelessness. Councils, within England, have a statutory duty in this regard under the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017. In identifying needs and acting to address that need, local councils can help to meet their statutory obligations.

A recent example of this is a partnership between Broadland Housing Association, Norwich City Council, and the Borough Council of King’s Lynn & West Norfolk using funding secured from MHCLG’s ‘Next Steps Accommodation Programme’ together with Homes England. A total of five projects have been approved to deliver six new-build modular flats on Norwich City Council land, ten one-bedroom flats across Norwich city centre through purchase from the open market, a further ten one-bedroom flats across Norwich as part of the Foundations Project (formerly known as the People Leaving Prison Project), and six self-contained flats through the extension and refurbishment of existing bedsit accommodation in King’s Lynn alongside seven new-build modular bungalow/ground floor properties on Council-owned land in King’s Lynn, for move-on accommodation, and the purchase of six one-bedroom flats from the open market within King’s Lynn town centre. What this demonstrates is that partnership working has provided the ability for the local councils to parcel up a range of approaches and sites to meet local needs and help tackle homelessness and the causes of homelessness, such as ex-offender housing needs.

4.5 Local Councils and Climate Change action through housing

On 9 December 2020, the UK Climate Change Committee released its Sixth Carbon Budget report³³, which included a number of subset reports and recommendations, including one specifically exploring the role of local councils, in carbon reduction. In terms of its recommendation on housing, the Committee on Climate Change suggests that new gas boilers should not be sold beyond 2033. Whilst many would welcome this commitment, new private developments continue to be built with older heating systems that embed a reliance on fossil fuels. In reality, this transfers the risk of future changes to heating systems

33 The Sixth Carbon Budget Report of the UK Committee on Climate Change Available at <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>

from developers to individual tenants or residents. The committee recommends that from 2025, which is still some four years away, no new gas boilers should be installed in new homes.

One way of moving away from reliance on gas boilers is to scale up the installation and use of heat pumps, with a recommendation that, by 2030, over a million new heat pumps should be installed in UK homes compared to the current level of 20,000 per annum.

In addition to these measures, it is recommended that existing district heating networks will need to switch to low-carbon sources, such as electric heat pumps or hydrogen sources, during the 2030s.

A further benefit to tenants and residents of home energy switching to renewable sources, alongside energy efficiency measures, is a reduction in fuel poverty. Like overall housing poverty there is an accepted measure of fuel poverty which could be considered to be a household that has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel or energy. A further definition is that a household is said to be in fuel poverty³⁴ if:

- They have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level), and
- Were they to spend that amount they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line

Whilst all of these factors are known to private developers, alongside councils and housing associations, the motivation for councils to act is driven by the overwhelming number of councils who have declared a Climate Emergency, which currently stands at 310 councils from across the UK.

As stewards of local place, and as democratic institutions in their own right, councils have a strong motivation to act on climate change. New build homes and retrofitting of existing properties is a significant way in which councils can demonstrate their commitments. Cornwall Council, through its wholly owned Cornwall Housing Company, is exploring how it can support whole house retrofit works targeted at approximately 4,500 private sector rented homes in Cornwall, using a system of loans.³⁵

In London, the Mayoral initiatives such as the Energy for Londoners programme³⁶ and the Retrofit Accelerator programme are designed to provide technical support to London Boroughs and housing associations to accelerate the retrofit revolution for private homes. Suitable schemes include upgrades to older homes, high-specification insulation schemes, renewable heating systems, including identifying properties suitable for installation of solar panels and other measures that would support reducing carbon emissions from homes.

These investments in retrofit programmes are set against some startling figures produced by the London Mayors office which is that Londoners spend around £3.5bn on home energy and near to 12% of Londoners will live in fuel poverty.

34 DECC 'A Framework for Future Action' (2013) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211180/FuelPovFramework.pdf

35 Cornwall Housing Whole House Retrofit Programme <https://www.cornwallhousing.org.uk/residents-area/repairs-and-maintenance/whole-house-retrofit/>

36 Energy for Londoners, Mayor of London, London Assembly <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/energy/energy-londoners>

In North Ayrshire, around 300 council houses have been fitted with solar panels and a further 441 council properties have been fitted with a new form of wall insulation following an investment of £3 million by the council.³⁷ It is estimated that tenants living in homes fitted with solar panels will save around £188 per year in energy costs. There are plans to fit solar panels to a further 500 homes and expand this saving to other council tenants.

A recent report by the TUC³⁸ 'Rebuilding after recession' suggests that building new social housing and retrofitting existing social housing stock could create around 500,000 new jobs. It also finds that investing in high-speed broadband could produce a further 40,000 jobs; there are further green benefits to these new jobs in enabling more efficient modern ways of working, in reducing the need to commute for some workers, alongside the obvious benefits of greener new homes.

4.6 Housing for fairness

In July 2019, APSE and the TCPA launched a report at the House of Lords which explored the unique place of councils in promoting housing for a fairer society. Recognising the flaws of the current system 'Housing for a fairer society: The role of councils in ensuring stronger societies'³⁹ called upon Government to suspend Right to Buy to enable councils to recalibrate their stock of council homes. This would bring England more in line with Scotland and Wales, where Right to Buy has now been abolished. The report also welcomed the removal of the borrowing cap on the HRA, but noted that due to stock transfers this would only help some councils, with 32% no longer having an HRA. The report also found that 59% of councils reported severe shortages of affordable housing and concluded that such shortages could not be addressed by markets alone and that councils should be at the heart of local housing delivery.

These arguments stand true in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the severe shortages of suitable affordable housing across the UK, the impact of quality and spatial standards in UK homes, and the wider place-based measures of community wellbeing such as access to green open space.

Therefore, this report concludes that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet the current and future housing needs across the UK without the direct delivery option for more and better council homes through local authorities. It also recognises the role of the not-for-profit social housing sector, including housing associations, in generating new homes for rent. Some of the models of direct interventions within the housing market by local authorities, and wholly owned housing companies, have also highlighted council involvement in building new homes for sale at both affordable levels, and at market rates. The use of market rate homes is a means by which the viability of some developments stacks up. This is not 'profit for shareholders' but 'profit for a purpose' allowing the cross subsidy within sites to generate more

37 North Ayrshire: Almost 300 council homes fitted with solar panels Article. <https://www.ardrossanherald.com/news/19204873.north-ayrshire-almost-300-council-homes-fitted-solar-panels/>

38 Rebuilding after recession, TUC Report (2021) Available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/rebuilding-after-recession-plan-jobs#:~:text=Research%20carried%20out%20for%20the,million%20jobs%20boost%20by%202022.&text=The%20report%20calls%20on%20government,council%20with%20unions%20and%20employers>

39 Housing for a fairer society <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/housing-for-a-fairer-society-the-role-of-councils-in-ensuring-stronger-societies/>

affordable units. This model is different and innovative allowing local needs to be met in a way that is supportive of and sympathetic to the needs at a local community level.

Through its unique position in the local area, local councils have also been able to take on sites where private developers show little or no interest, including smaller sites or sites that may require remediation works or new access ways. In other words, the motivation of councils is to deliver the homes needed at a community level, using their knowledge and a drive for outcomes that are not related to profit motives.

Chapter 5: Post COVID Recovery and Housing Need

5.1 The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers

At the beginning of 2020 news of a health pandemic began to emerge from China, spreading quickly to Europe with Italy amongst the earliest affected European states. A deadly respiratory illness, more severe in older or vulnerable people, but invisible, and with mounting infections and death tolls, the pandemic quickly began to expose not just health inequalities but economic inequalities too.

Whilst initial governmental responses globally were sluggish, it quickly became apparent that to control the spread of the deadly virus, populations would, by necessity, need to be placed into some form of lockdown. Across the UK, its administrations in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland ordered lockdowns. The statutory emergency regulations closed businesses and ordered others to work from home.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS)⁴⁰, of the employed population some 35.9% did some work at home during 2020. This represents an increase of 9.4% compared to 2019. Importantly, however, the ONS statistics show a change in the type of people who worked from home in 2020. Typically, higher earners have been more likely to work from home, earning on average according to the ONS data, around 20% more than the average wage. The expanse of homeworking to a new range of workers suggests this may no longer hold true. The ONS report also highlights those workers working from home did 6.0 hours of unpaid overtime on average per week in 2020, and this is compared with 3.6 hours for those that never work from home. Homeworkers are also less likely to be promoted and were around 38% less likely on average to have received a bonus compared with those who never worked from home between 2013 and 2020.

The introduction of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, following pressure from Trade Unions, the TUC, and employers' associations, led to a cumulative 11.2 million jobs having been supported by the scheme with millions of workers receiving Furlough payments.

The pandemic has however exposed the differences in suitable homes to accommodate home-working.

5.2 Homes not fit for homeworking purpose

Whilst homeworking has not been a matter of choice but a necessity for many workers, it is recognised that some workers have benefited from these new working arrangements: avoiding a daily commute, greater flexibility in working hours (in some sectors) and arguably a better work-life balance. For others, this has not been the case.

40 Homeworking hours, rewards and opportunities in the UK: 2011 to 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/homeworkinghoursrewardsandopportunitiesintheuk2011to2020/2021-04-19#characteristics-and-location-of-homeworkers>

The pandemic has exposed the paucity of housing quality in a number of groups of workers. For example, the growth in young people and older single people relying on HMOs for their housing needs has resulted in problems for those who needed to self-isolate but are forced to use shared bathrooms and kitchens. For working parents, the burden of balancing childcare whilst homeworking appears to have fallen disproportionately on female workers. However, in many homes an overriding issue has been the lack of a dedicated workspace.

A campaign led by the National Housing Federation 'Homes at the Heart'⁴¹ and five other leading housing organisations, and supported by UNISON, has recently highlighted that the country's housing crisis is making lockdown even worse for millions of UK citizens and families. Following a YouGov survey it found:

- 3.7m people are living in overcrowded homes, including a record 1.6m children.
- 30,000 people spent lockdown in a home that consisted of just one room, and more than 3,600 children are spending lockdown in a home made up of just two rooms.
- 62,580 families are living in temporary accommodation, the highest number for 13 years.
- Millions more people across the country spent lockdown in homes that are damp and mouldy, insecure or in homes that are pushing them into debt.

The 'Homes at the Heart' campaign also found that the lack of space and cramped living conditions has played a big role in causing health problems for these huge numbers of people during lockdown with 52% reporting that their homes were not big enough and 1 in 10 of all British adults feeling depressed during lockdown because of a lack of space in their home.

The report suggested this also led to an increase in those seeking mental health support. Notwithstanding the serious impact poor housing has on individuals, it also has a much wider impact on social wellbeing and the economy, creating further pressures on public services including mental health support.

5.3 What does 'good' homeworking look like?

The Scottish TUC⁴² recently published a survey that found a mixed picture of support from employers for homeworking. Professor Phil Taylor, of the University of Strathclyde suggested that 'There is [also] compelling evidence that WFH is not desirable for a significant minority. The reasons are many and complex, but include inadequate domestic workstation arrangements, space constraints, compromised work-life balance, gendered experiences of domestic and household burdens and loneliness and isolation.'

41 Homes at the Heart Campaign National Housing Federation <https://www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs/news/poor-housing-causing-health-problems-for-nearly-a-third-of-brits-during-lockdown/>

42 STUC 365 days of homeworking <https://www.stuc.org.uk/media-centre/news/1581/365-days-of-homeworking>

UNISON's bargaining guide⁴³ supports similar conclusions. Whilst some workers have undoubtedly benefitted, including workers with disabilities, who in some cases found home working created less fatigue and improved access to facilities such as toilets, for others a number of concerns have arisen including: –

- Having to share workspaces. As many homes will not have adequate space for a home office or dedicated room, this will typically be working at a kitchen worktop or dining table.
- A lack of suitable desks, chairs, and computers.
- Struggles with poor WiFi connections.
- Issues for young people living in shared accommodation and bedsits, often working in their bedrooms or communal rooms.
- Workers experiencing worse symptoms of musculoskeletal pain, higher levels of fatigue, poor sleep, and higher levels of eye strain.

Whilst Trade Union guidance concentrates on the bargaining aspects of homeworking, it should also be noted that each strand significantly identifies that access to homeworking is highly dependent on adequate space at home. The Resolution Foundation identified that just 44% of homeworking was amongst the lowest paid workers whilst it ran at 83% amongst the highest paid.

The correlation between low pay and inadequate housing is already explored in Chapter 2 of this report. Essentially, the overriding conclusion is that the lower the pay, the lesser the quality of housing, which leads to the poorest experiences of homeworking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unless there can be rapid improvements in housing quality, this inequality of experience will continue post-pandemic should employers demand more homeworking amongst their staff.

What this means looking to the future is that housing fit for future workers must accommodate adequate standards for new homes.

For homeworkers to enjoy the best possible experience this would ideally mean: –

- A private and safe working space without encroaching on 'living space'.
- Adequate space to house equipment including ergonomically adjustable furniture and equipment.
- Adaptable workstations for workers with disability.
- Excellent WiFi connectivity.
- Good lighting and heating systems.
- Access to outside space to enable breaks and fresh air away from computer screens.

These physical factors are, of course, outside of the obvious other requirements around support at work, avoiding isolation, mentoring support, and so forth, and for women, in particular, a recognition of a genuine work-life balance with supported childcare/carer responsibilities.

43 UNISON COVID-19 Working from Home Guidance <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/03/COVID-19-working-from-home-guidance-and-model-policy-9-April-2021.pdf>

5.4 Inadequacy of quality and spatial standards in UK homes

The issue of spatial standards is not new and in fact can be traced back to the Great Fire of London. A report by Julia Park of Levitt Bernstein ⁴⁴ chronicles the history of spatial standards and identifies the relative lack of protection for standards that would otherwise ensure adequate and comfortable home environments.

Similarly, the use of Permitted Development Rights (PDR), which allows for changes of use in premises – for example from commercial or office accommodation to housing – has again highlighted the lack of protection on both spatial standards and local environmental quality.

Following criticism from The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Town and Country Planning Association, APSE and the Local Government Association amongst others, the Government consulted on changes to regulations around Permitted Developments.

This has led to amendments to the Town and Country Planning (Permitted Development and Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 coming into force on 24 June 2020. The regulations also amended the 2015 Order. This means that individual Permitted Developments, such as office to residential accommodation, now requires ‘adequate natural light in all habitable rooms’

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into effect on 6 April 2021, and requires all new homes created under PDRs to comply ‘as a minimum’ with the nationally described space standards.

Whilst these regulatory amendments are welcome this still leaves a gap in homes that have been built or permitted with poor spatial standards and light, including rooms without windows. Moreover, many Permitted Developments fall short of the usual planning considerations in terms of access to transport links, parks and public realm, healthcare, and education facilities.

To emerge positively from the COVID-19 pandemic there is a genuine need to not just provide ‘affordable’ homes but homes of quality that can be adaptable to changing work patterns. Consideration of homeworking requirements will be essential in what may be regarded as the ‘new normal’ but the wider placemaking role of affordable housing, including transport and accessibility for workers who may not be able to work from home, should also be a primary consideration.

A key consideration in post-COVID recovery must be regulatory safeguards to ensure homes of the future do not make those who live in them ill. As we have learned from the inadequate homeworking conditions of many workers – the quality of a home, with space, light, affordable energy and access to open space – can mean the difference between good physical and mental health or poor outcomes.

The Healthy Homes Act advocated by the Town and Country Planning Association⁴⁵, a planning charity, provides governments with a way in which this could be achieved with legislative protection of standards to secure good homes and good place.

44 Parks, J. (2017) ‘One Hundred Years of Housing Space Standards: What Now?’ Published by Levitt Bernstein Available at https://www.levittbernstein.co.uk/site/assets/files/2682/one_hundred_years_of_housing_space_standards.pdf

45 The Healthy Homes Act Campaign, TCPA <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/healthy-homes-act>

A decent place to live:
Homes fit for Key Workers

By enshrining in law healthy homes principles, the proposed Act would protect communities from poor quality housing, securing simple but often ignored design principles which make homes and places better, and less likely to damage the health of citizens.

Such an Act would place a new duty on the Secretary of State or relevant Minister in a devolved administration to secure ‘the health, safety, wellbeing and convenience of people in or around new buildings, and on local authorities to plan for the long-term delivery of affordable housing’.

Chapter 6: Voices of the people

As part of this research, roundtable discussions and interviews took place with UNISON housing forum members, APSE member councils and case study authorities.

The themes identified within this report are also supported by case studies and survey work including UNISON's own survey of its membership conducted in October 2020. As the UK's largest public sector-based trade union, its respondent cohort of public sector workers should be regarded as a fair sample of respondents.

6.1 UNISON survey results

Primary concerns 774 UNISON members responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were from Eastern Region (32.8%) and South-Eastern Region (23.2%). This reflects the serious housing shortages and affordability issues in those regions.

The survey identified four primary concerns:

- High cost of housing.
- Impact of COVID-19 on housing costs and living standards.
- Quality of housing.
- Commuting costs.

Costs of Housing

The high costs of housing are hitting household budgets and affecting living standards.

- 27.8% said the cost of housing is making them look elsewhere to live and work – a figure that rises to 48.2% for health workers in the private rented sector.
- 60.8% said they were really struggling to manage financially or are just about managing.
- Housing costs are up to £300 a week for 14.4% of people.
- 9.2% say their housing is unsatisfactory, but it is all they can afford.
- 11.8% say they want to move but can't afford to.
- 10.1% say their adult children cannot afford to move out or find a place of their own.

Impact of COVID-19 on housing costs and living standards

The UNISON survey showed that a number of respondents have been severely impacted by the pandemic, putting some at risk of eviction and homelessness in the coming months.

- 34.9% had lost income/seen their income reduced due to the economic impact of COVID-19.
- 10.4% have missed rent/deferred mortgage payments or have fallen into arrears.
- 6.4% are struggling to pay their housing costs.
- 9.9% are struggling to pay household bills.

A decent place to live:
Homes fit for Key Workers

- 12.1% are getting into debt, and are worried about losing all or some of their income.
- 3.2% have been threatened with – or faced – eviction and homelessness.

Quality of housing/housing situation

Properties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) are generally poorly maintained.

- **100%** of those renting from the PRS said their landlord does not maintain their home to an adequate standard.
- **17.6%** are in overcrowded homes or have fewer rooms than is required with some children/family members having to share a room.

Commuting and housing

The UNISON survey identified that some people are spending large proportions of their income on housing or a lot of time and money on long commutes:

- 23.4% spend more than £1000 a year getting to work
- 27.8% would like to live nearer their workplace. In London, the figure is 36.4%.
- 5% of respondents spend over an hour travelling to and from work

Housing circumstances	of UNISON members
Owner occupied (paying with a mortgage)	35.6%
Owner occupied (mortgage paid)	20.9%
Rent privately	19.3%
Rent from a council or housing association	17%
Other (including shared/part ownership)	3.3%

Support for housing action amongst respondents

Survey respondents wanted to see action to solve the housing crisis and would like to see the following measures introduced (during and after the pandemic):

- **96.2%** say the government should do more to address the housing shortage of affordable homes. The figure is 100% for respondents from London.
- **74.1%** say councils and housing associations should be provided with funding to build 150,000 new social and genuinely affordable homes per year. This figure rises to **78.5%** for respondents from London.
- **68.0%** say councils should be provided with adequate funding to house the vulnerable (rough sleepers and homeless households) during and after the pandemic.
- **63.7%** want to end the five-week wait for universal credit and housing benefit.
- **62.1%** want to provide funding for councils to take back sub-standard accommodation from private landlords.
- **58.4%** want legislation to set fair rents and limit increases in the private rented sector.
- **55.9%** want evictions/repossessions suspended for the duration of the pandemic.
- **47.6%** want clear guidance put in place on how rent arrears can be minimised, through clearer guidance to landlords backed by legislation

- **44.9%** want to give tenants longer to pay back rent arrears
- **43.6%** want to end the bedroom tax and repeal the two-child limit
- **42.8%** want to raise local housing allowance (housing benefit) to cover average rents in local areas
- **39.4%** want to scrap no-fault evictions by introducing indefinite, permanent tenancies
- **32.2%** want to end the benefit cap, which hits families with high housing costs
- **24.4%** want to lift the caps on property size restrictions on housing benefit for private renters

Roundtable themes

Amongst both housing activists and wider local authority housing contacts a number of themes emerged from discussions.

Local authorities and social landlords are key to solving housing issues

For all of the reasons identified in this report, the ongoing failure to deliver on new homes at affordable rents or purchase prices is not deemed to be resolvable by private markets. The interventionist approaches developed by councils and housing associations are found to meet needs in a more coherent and socially just way.

However, the problems of scale remain. Piecemeal funding, new initiatives, and specific blocks of activity in Government-led announcements do not provide the long-term solutions to resolve the housing shortages. A longer-term vision, supported by funding and better regulation, is needed to allow councils, housing associations and their partners to build homes where they are most needed.

Housing capacity must be rebuilt to build new homes

The fragmentation of housing into multiple providers has not helped the housing industry. Decades of decline in housing skills mean an ongoing shortage of construction skills, apprentice opportunities and wider place-based connections. Planning is also an area where perceived or actual weaknesses in the system leave many frustrated by the scope of building better places.

Market regulation

The decline in social housing provision has been coupled with a light touch regulatory framework that works in favour of the market delivery mechanism as opposed to the social outcomes provided through affordable housing.

Recent improvements to areas of regulation, such as controls over permitted developments, are welcome. However, these are within an overall weak regulatory framework, with many councils and planning professionals feeling ill-equipped to uphold standards that would make for better homes and better overall housing developments.

Green economy

There was strong support to ensure that housing, and affordable housing in particular, could act as the catalyst to promote new green jobs and new green skills. This could range from everything such as the most sustainable production of materials at a local level to ensuring new homes are fossil-fuel free. However, the balance of cost, particularly in research and development, meant that the public sector may be the developer best able to accommodate the risks and costs of newer practices. This has already been demonstrated by councils rolling out solar PV schemes on social housing.

Housing as part of the 'Build Back Better' post-COVID recovery

The disparities of wealth and health across the UK have been spotlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with research consistently showing the poorer health outcomes and mortality rates amongst the poorest communities and amongst BAME communities and people with disabilities. This correlation of evidence of these outcomes more than suggests that, in many cases, housing quality, coupled with overcrowding, has played a strong part in these negative outcomes.

As the economy starts to recover from the impact of the health pandemic, the role of social housing should be at the heart of the recovery strategy.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout the research for this report what is increasingly clear is that markets alone will not solve the housing crisis.

The decline in funding for council housing is matched by a decline in the numbers of new homes being built. The lack of supply and the interface with land values has a direct impact on the numbers of affordable homes available for workers to rent or buy.

The planning system across much of the UK, but most especially within England, leaves a vacuum in regulation that is being exploited. Too many developments fail to increase the volume of affordable homes needed. In areas of high demand by developers' councils may be better able to negotiate appropriate levels of affordable homes. However, in areas of low demand by developers many councillors have reported a feeling of frustration and a 'take it or leave' approach by developers.

The use and expansion of permitted development rights, in England, has further undermined the role of councils in placemaking. The lack of regulation over permitted developments was described in one roundtable event as 'permitting new slums'. Coming on the back of austerity and decline in the so called 'left behind' communities, there is genuine concerns that the use of permitted developments for housing will create socially and economically isolated housing 'islands', without any of the usual supporting community facilities and functions such as transport, public realm and access to GP surgeries and educational facilities.

A further key finding of this research is that the longer this crisis in affordable housing goes on the bigger the gap which must be closed. As each year fails to deliver the new homes needed, subsequent years need to play catch up in demand.

The situation is getting ever more critical. Whilst initiatives such as the lifting of the borrowing cap on HRA accounts has had a marginal impact on new council homes in England, just 6,531 affordable homes were delivered by local authorities in 2018-2019⁴⁶. This represents just 11% of the overall affordable housing delivery, which provided a total of 57,644 new affordable homes. This is just 23% of all new builds. Whilst this is an improvement from the preceding decades it goes nowhere near the identified need of at least 145,000 affordable homes each year. By contrast in Scotland, a much smaller nation, it managed to achieve 1413 local authority new builds in 2018-2019⁴⁷ and an additional 4129 new homes through housing associations. In Wales it is reported that 81 council properties were completed against

46 Assets Publishing Service Affordable Housing Supply 2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940517/AHS_2019-20.pdf

47 National Statistics Release for Scotland Housing supply 2018-2019 <https://www.housingnet.co.uk/pdf/housing-statistics-scotland-2019-key-trends-summary.pdf>

1117 by registered social landlords.⁴⁸ The Welsh Government has however committed to a mass council house building programme. It is also noted that the new homes in Scotland and Wales will no longer be subject to Right to Buy and yet this policy persist in England, removing from councils the very stock it so desperately needs, with ineffective means to replace that stock. Minor changes on the use of Right to Buy receipts announced in the Spring Budget 2021, whilst a step in the right direction, will not significantly change the difficulties which English councils face in replacing the homes lost under Right to Buy.

In earlier chapters we explored the efforts made by local councils and indeed national governments in the post war era. Such comprehensive public policy approaches clearly worked. This is contrasted by decades of cuts in public sector-led house-building and funding, in one form or another, and the marketisation and fragmentation of social housing.

Even as late as 1979 local authorities were delivering around 32% of new homes but by 2007 it is reported that they delivered just 0.0014%. Housing associations have, by contrast, grown their share of new homes to around 12% of all completions. Even with this growth in housing association new homes the role of local councils must not be underestimated. To meet housing need there will have to be a concerted effort across all sectors within the economy.

Governments across the UK have demonstrated, by their spending on the pandemic response, that it no longer holds true to deny the ability of governments to spend their way out of a crisis. Housing is in crisis and massive crisis investment must follow to build the homes that communities need. Every worker, every family and every local resident should be able to afford to live in a decent secure home.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a real opportunity to take-up the slack created in the economy to inject public sector led investment in social housing. New homes, that are green homes, can generate spending in supply chains, jobs and reskilling displaced workers from industries that have either not survived the pandemic, or are simply hanging on by a thread. A green-growth investment plan, in a new generation of council homes, may be the very route-map to post COVID recovery that ministers have promised.

This report therefore leads to 7 key recommendations

Recommendations

1. Investment in a new generation of council housing, at scale, has to be at the heart of solving the crisis in affordable homes to rent.

This will mean leveraging capital investment levels last seen in the post-war years alongside a delivery strategy that pulls together the materials, supplies, land and skills needed to get homes built at the scale needed across the UK. The barriers and bureaucracy associated with Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA), and the lack of an HRA in around a third of English councils must be addressed to remove any barriers to delivering new council homes. Government subsidy for new build council housing in Scotland must be raised to match that for Registered Social Landlords (RSL) new build.

48 Stats Wales New Dwellings Completed by Period and Tenure <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/New-House-Building/newdwellingscompleted-by-period-tenure>

2. The new generation of council housing must maximise the opportunities for green growth and green construction skills.

Responding to the housing crisis must also address the climate crisis. The new generation of council homes should therefore maximise the opportunities for local councils to develop and grow their local workforce; developing green apprenticeships, recruiting local workers into new fields of green construction and skilling the workers of the future to meet the challenges of climate change. From new skills in green home energy to securing green skills in local environmental services, this approach secures the jobs and skills needed now and in a low-carbon future. This approach must be centred upon local councils as anchor institutions, nurturing sustainable growth and the wellbeing of residents at a community level, as opposed to extractive market-based economic models.

3. New homes must be ‘Healthy Homes’ and, for this reason, adoption of the Healthy Homes Act should be a priority.

The Healthy Homes Act advocated by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) offers a powerful way for national governments and local councils to promote and secure good place-making. Enshrined in law, healthy homes principles would protect communities from poor quality housing, securing such simple but often ignored design principles of access to light, public realm, and quality and space standards.

Whilst in Scotland emerging legislation will support improvements within housing standards, such an Act in other UK administrations would place a new duty on the Secretary of State or relevant Minister in a devolved administration to secure ‘the health, safety, wellbeing and convenience of people in or around new buildings, and on local authorities to plan for the long-term delivery of affordable housing’.

4. Re-empower councils with meaningful control of planning and place-making outcomes.

Deregulation of planning and austerity has left councils feeling powerless to act in creating safe and strong, healthy and wealthy sustainable local communities – this must be reversed.

The ongoing use of Permitted Development Rights runs the risk of creating the slums of tomorrow. Poor quality housing developments, including changes of use which undermine the very concepts of communities, should have no place in modern housing development. Meaningful re-empowerment of councils, in planning controls and rebuilding council planning departments, must be at the heart of any plans to ‘build back better’.

5. A wider exploration, and expansion of Living Rents pilots should be considered, giving immediate support to those living in housing poverty.

Whilst Living Rents are not the only solution to housing affordability, better linking earnings and rent paid would lift thousands out of rent poverty. This concept should be explored, tested and expanded. It will not substitute for building a new generation of council housing but would be a pragmatic support to those living now in poverty as a result of the cost of housing.

6. Welfare reforms have fundamentally damaged the link between household income and housing affordability. The link between Local Housing Allowance, housing benefit and rents should be restored to provide immediate relief to those facing an acute crisis of housing affordability.

Whilst Government injected some emergency cash into Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Universal Credit payments during the health pandemic, the LHA is not fit for purpose as it does not meet the true costs of rent. This places renters in a poverty trap, forced to either top up rents from meagre benefits or low pay or stopping people from finding a home to rent altogether.

A long-term restoration of the link between LHA, housing benefit and rents would provide relief to those facing hardship, beyond the current health crisis. This will also support local councils who face avoidable demands on homelessness services, and other services, because of the inadequacies of the current levels of LHA, housing benefits and unaffordable rents.

7. Right to Buy in England should be subject to local moratoriums

Abolition of Right to Buy in Scotland and Wales has enabled public authorities to better meet local housing need. English councils, in the absence of abolition of Right to Buy, should at the very least be able to apply their own moratorium on Right to Buy sales, with full flexibility and autonomy to make decisions in the interests of their communities. The existing cycle of investment and enforced sales is ultimately harmful to the delivery of new homes. Local councils have the expertise and local knowledge to know best what delivers for their communities. They should be trusted to decide.

Chapter 8: Case Studies

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Current housing stock and summary of housing

Latest figures estimate that the average house price in the Wakefield district is in the region of £157,000 meaning that buying a home continues to be affordable for many, especially those who travel to jobs outside the Wakefield district, where wages are higher. This makes the Wakefield district an attractive and affordable place to settle.

The housing market in Wakefield is not an overheated housing market, such as Leeds, where street line terraces can cost £200,000.

- **Social Housing**

Social housing in the district is provided by Registered Providers with the largest provider being Wakefield and District (WDH)

WDH was established in 2005 and is now one of the UK's largest social housing providers, with over 32,000 homes across the Wakefield district and wider operating area across the north of England.

What challenges does the Council face on housing needs?

- **Demographics and geography**

The number of households in the district is growing, and by 2031 it is estimated that there will be 15,309 more households.

A few areas fall into the bottom 10% of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and these tend to be the areas where there's quite a concentration of social housing, primarily large monotenure estates from the 1950s.

Despite relatively modest house price rises and the earnings gap between Wakefield district residents and the Leeds City Region and England averages narrowing for some of our residents in recent years, local pay for people on lower wages appears to have stagnated, meaning that buying a house for those people continues to be difficult. These people are often forced into the private or social rented sector

- **Waiting list**

The number of people registered for social housing continues to increase and currently stands at over 27,000 with 4,550 of these in bands A and B meaning they have pressing need for housing.

- **Right to Buy (loss of stock)**

WDH says it loses around 150 homes a year to the right-to-buy scheme.

- **Homelessness**

In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came in to force and brought about significant changes to how local authorities deal with homelessness with a range of new statutory duties. The number of people approaching the Council for homelessness support has typically been around 650 per year. However, since the new Act came in to force the calculation has changed and the figure for 2020/21 was 3019 and is projected to be 3186 for 21/22

- **Private rented sector**

According to the last housing survey, there is about 21 000 private rented properties in the authority which amounts to around 15% of total properties. Though not as prevalent as other parts of the country it has nevertheless doubled over the last 15 years.

- **Specialist housing**

The SHMA highlighted that specialist housing need, whether for physical or mental disability, will increase considerably over the next 15 years. There will also be a large increase in demand for specialist elderly housing, including sheltered accommodation and extra care housing, as the numbers of elderly residents significantly increases.

How is the Council meeting housing need?

- **Targets set by the Local Development Framework**

The Council's LDF guides the use of land and new development throughout the district. The LDF sets a target of 1,600 homes to be built every year. The Council's current policy on all housing developments over 15 homes requires that developers must provide 30% affordable housing. This is subject to viability and forms part of the planning process through section 106 agreements.

The Council is currently consulting on its new Local Plan, which will guide development up to 2036. It is proposed that the new Local Plan will contain an annual target of 1,400 new homes to be built but this is subject to final approval through the examination process.

- **New build programmes**

The District has witnessed impressive housing growth with 9653 new homes built between 2015-2020. This peaked to 2,148 in 2018/19 although it fell to 1800 in 19/20 .

The Council has brought forward housing developments on a succession of challenging regeneration sites, including the Girnhill Estate at Featherstone, City Estate at Fitzwilliam and the former Frickley Colliery site at South Elmsall.

The thriving Bridge Homes local housing company has already delivered 30% affordable housing on its first three sites with more planned.

The Council is proactively reducing the number of empty properties in the district.

The district is seen by developers as a good place to build new homes, which has supported the healthy housing growth. Much of this new housing has unlocked wider regeneration opportunities as well as providing a strong foundation for transforming local places.

- **Wakefield Builds**

‘Wakefield Builds’, launched in 2016, aims to create stronger working relationships between developers and the Council in order to meet its annual LDF target of 1,600 new homes. The initiative offers greater support to smaller and medium-sized housebuilders.

Throughout the Council – its members, officers and planning team – good relationships are in place with developers and this helps to promote housing growth.

- **Maintaining standards in the private rented sector**

The Wakefield District does not have a big problem with rogue landlords or large enclaves of poor private rented accommodation. There are areas of housing under “stress” and there are landlords who deliberately fail to comply with standards and exploit tenants. The Council deals with all complaints from tenants and also has a strategic proactive area based enforcement strategy. .

- **General needs and specialist affordable housing**

Around 350 section 106 affordable homes are built each year and that includes specialist housing such as bungalows and wheelchair-accessible properties. These are usually a mix of shared ownership, social rent and affordable rent as set out in the approved SHMA.

Quality Standards/Design

- **Energy efficiency**

The Council’s current climate change action plan aims to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions across the Council’s operations and a similar plan is currently being worked up to cover district-wide emissions, which will include objectives to make homes more energy efficient. The Council hopes to play a leadership role in supporting, enabling, and accelerating work – alongside partners, businesses, other public sector orgs, the 3rd sector, and communities – to help to decarbonise the district, towards a net zero position, by 2038 at the latest. .

- **Spatial standards**

The Council has in place two Supplementary Planning Documents – the Residential Design Guide and the Wakefield City Centre Urban Design Framework. These documents encourage better quality housing and these present significant material considerations when determining planning applications. This enables the Council to promote a strong focus on high quality housing design and well-designed schemes that support the delivery of healthy and adaptable lifetime homes. It also introduces development principles that incorporate ‘Active Design’ and ‘Healthy Streets’.

The draft Local Plan contains new draft policies on ‘Accessible Housing Standards’, ‘Minimum Space Standards’ and ‘Sub-division and Multiple Occupation of Homes’ including ‘Student Housing’. These new draft policies will be used to determine planning applications to assist with achieving good quality housing design standards.

Other comments

- **Plans to repurpose empty high streets?**

There are concerns about permitted development standards in the Council. That said, the Council has just received £49m of Town Fund monies to contribute to several housing led schemes in Wakefield and Castleford centres.

North Kesteven District Council

Current housing stock

The total number of social housing dwellings in North Kesteven is around 3,800.

What challenges does the Council face on housing needs?

- **Geography and demographics**

The location of current social and affordable housing doesn't match where the demand is; 43% of the housing stock is bungalows, occupied predominantly by older people; only 12% of the housing stock are flats or 1 bed houses, generally let to singles and couples under 60, but these households make up more than 50% of applicants on the housing register (62%).

Being a rural district, the Council has a range of settlements from better facilitated large villages, through to small hamlets with no local facilities or public transport links, as well as two towns; the market town of Sleaford, and North Hykeham, located on the fringe of the City of Lincoln. Within that context, getting to places is a real challenge for those that do not have access to a car. The Council also has a north and south divide; residents find it very difficult to travel between the north and south of the district.

- **Waiting list**

There are 2,060 on the waiting list as at 1st April 2021. Rented need remains the biggest single type of affordable housing.

- **Right to Buy**

At its peak in the late 1970s, the Council had a housing stock of around 5,500. By 2009, the Right to Buy reduced this figure by around 30%.

The Council loses, on average, 25 homes a year through the Right to Buy scheme. The scheme has been exercised mainly in the Council's more desirable areas – following the national trend. The vast majority that the Council loses through right to buy are on social rent terms, but the vast majority of replacements that the Council delivers are on affordable rent terms.

- **Homelessness**

The Council received a £600,000 government grant in 2020 to help tackle homelessness and rough sleepers in the district through a partnership approach. The Rough Sleeper Project provides a support service, outreach service, emergency accommodation as well as move-on accommodation. This has built upon the "Everybody In" scheme, which managed to house 12 people since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Specialist housing**

The Council is exploring delivery of a large Extra Care scheme within the District in partnership with the tier two authority, Lincolnshire County Council.

How is the Council meeting housing need

- **Progress since 2010**

In a new era of house building North Kesteven District Council built 100 homes between 2009 and end of 2014. By the end of 2016 had completed its 200th Council house for people in need of quality, affordable housing in the district.

- **Central Lincolnshire Local Plan**

North Kesteven works in partnership with two other authorities in Lincolnshire County Council to produce the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. The driver of the Plan is to set out other things the housing need for the area and within that the affordable housing need for the area.

In the current plan, the councils need to deliver around 1500 homes per annum across the three authorities of North Kesteven, West Lindsey, Lincoln and within that about half of that delivery is in NK. North Kesteven is in a position where it ought to be delivering around 250/300 affordable homes per annum year on year.

- **Registered providers and Section 106**

As a strategic enabler, the Council works with a number of registered provider partners who play a key role in delivering housing.

A major challenge relates to viability; the Council has difficulty attracting new registered providers or the big six developers because it's more viable for them to be delivering houses in Nottingham or Leicester.

Another challenge with providers relates to whether they pick up Section 106 units. This can depend on the business plans of RPs as well their strategic partnerships with Homes England; Section 106 does not count against the targets set in the strategic partnerships. Affordable housing obligations can result in a big hit to the profits of developers so the Council is always mindful of striking the right balance between incentives and obligations.

Lafford Homes

Lafford Homes – the Council's wholly owned local authority housing company – was set up in 2016. Its aim is to unlock more housing choice by building and buying more homes for let at a market level rent. Lafford Homes uses existing building firms to fulfil its projects, and will seek to raise the bar as an exemplar landlord, in terms of rental standards across the board.

Quality Standards/Design

- **Energy efficiency**

The provision of comfortable, quality homes remains a strong priority for the Council, with ambitious plans to create many more houses for people who need a home across the District and to continue to build them in an innovative, energy efficient way to NK's exacting standards so that they are easy and affordable to live in.

- **Passivhaus**

The Executive Board resolved on 1 April that that all new build properties be constructed to net zero carbon in use and certified Passivhaus standard.

The Council has trialled a pair of Passivhaus builds which have been successfully occupied by people who have now got low running costs. A recent project consists of eight properties that will be built to Passivhaus standards.

The Council is currently reviewing the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, a central strand of which is building compatibly with a zero carbon future.

- **Spatial standards**

The Council always set out to build properties that are in excess of the building regulations. Early properties were built to the Code for Sustainable Homes; aspiring to code level four.

Since 2010 the Council has ensured all its properties are built to NDSS. It has also driven up those standards with its own Fabric First standard. The Fabric First standard has had two iterations – 2013 and 2018 – and both of those standards built on the building regulations with had high insulation values; affordable to live in whilst being low carbon.

Other comments

- **Repurposing high streets**

Relative to other parts of the UK, the local high street has not been hit hard. However, the lockdown has brought the future viability of many local shops into serious question. The Council has introduced measures aimed at promoting the night time economy in Sleaford.

- **[Sleaford Moor Enterprise park](#)**

The [Sleaford Moor Enterprise park](#) is a 37-acre development by North Kesteven District Council aiming to boost the local economy. It is expected to bring up to 500 jobs for the area when it has been fully completed in 2027.

- **Relaxation of planning laws**

There's concern about the relaxation of planning rules. Namely, poorly designed properties being built or repurposed in inadequate locations.

- **Will pressure on social housing increase in coming years?**

The past year has borne witness to a significant increase of people on the housing register. Numbers on the waiting list have increased by 152% over the five years since 2016.

The Council is starting to see more need for shared ownership and for discount market products, as well as a rented offer.

West Lothian Council

Current housing stock and summary of housing

The Council has a housing stock of approximately 14,000 homes, almost all of which are let to tenants. There are also about 7,000 RSL homes.

What challenges does the Council face on housing needs?

- **Demographics and geography**

Between 1998 and 2019, the population of West Lothian has increased by 19.5%. This is the second highest percentage change out of the 32 council areas in Scotland. Over the same period, Scotland's population rose by 7.6%. On 30 June 2019, the population of West Lothian was 183,100. This is an increase of 0.5% from 182,140 in 2018. Over the same period, the population of Scotland increased by 0.5%.

Competing demand: There is very high demand for housing in the east part of West Lothian which tends to be the more affluent. The west part of West Lothian is less affluent but there is a greater supply of housing and more turnover in the west part of West Lothian so it's difficult to balance that competing demand.

- **Waiting list**

The waiting list was 8,500 but, due to COVID, is now much higher at more than 10,000.

- **Right to Buy**

As a result of the Right-to-Buy Scheme, the number of properties in the Council's ownership has reduced. The Right to Buy came to an end in Scotland in August 2016.

- **Homelessness**

Youth homelessness is a particular issue – the fourth highest rate in Scotland. Therefore, pressure around that means providing supported housing for young people at the moment. Visible rough sleeping is not a major issue in West Lothian but people reporting they have slept in cars or stairwells has increased in the last year.

- **Specialist housing**

There is a need for specialist housing provision to enable people to live independently.

When it comes to the private sector, there has been large scale developments at two particular core development areas and a lot of new build housing coming forward. During the pandemic there's been fairly sustained levels of completions with the focus generally on family housing.

The only gap in the private sector is that developers do not give much consideration to specialist provision such as wheelchair housing or even bungalows. The planners have to encourage them to provide a range of house types.

Due to funding availability for council housing, more slightly smaller homes are being built. This is in line with most of the demand.

How is the Council meeting housing need?

New build housing is not new to the Council. In 2007, West Lothian Council began a New Build Council Housing Programme. Two phases of building have already been completed. Phase 1, a total of 255 homes, and Phase 2, a total of 545 homes. Both have been built, with the last site completed in March 2015.

Since 2010, a total of 800 new homes have been built which means that West Lothian Council has built more houses than any other local authority in Scotland during the period 2012-2015.

A range of house types and sizes have been delivered including; flats, cottage flats (a 4-in-a-block with individual access), semi-detached, detached family houses and fully accessible bungalows. Valuable lessons have been learned from these projects and this knowledge is now being used in the planning and development of the next phase of new build housing.

The approved West Lothian Housing Strategy 2017-2022 recognises the need to increase the supply of affordable housing in West Lothian to meet need and demand. Included within the strategy is a target of 3,000 affordable homes being provided in West Lothian over the 10-year period to 2022. The Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023 commits the Council to increasing the number of affordable homes through the New Build Council Housing Programme and working in partnership with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

Good progress has been made towards achieving the 3,000 affordable homes target. 2258 homes have been delivered, 429 are under construction and there is a pipeline of future Council and RSL developments which will take place over the next few years.

The mid-market rent and the shared equity have generally come through affordable housing policy sites – 15% have to be social rent and the other 10% can be other tenures that are still affordable. There are relatively few units of affordable housing provided that are not social rented because the demand in West Lothian is very high for social rented housing.

Helping young people transition out of care settings can be challenging. The Council is currently developing properties for people with complex autism.

Quality Standards/Design

The Council's new build programme meets silver sustainability standards. However, to meet Gold standard or even Passivhaus would result in the number of houses reducing because of the higher costs associated at present.

The Council are waiting to hear what support may become available from the Scottish Government to help with the net zero carbon agenda.

The pandemic, and accompanying increase in working from home, has thrown into sharp relief the importance of spatial standards in housing. The Council is now reviewing the large number of post-war housing stock and undertaking a stock condition survey.

The Council has made off-the-shelf purchases from developers. There are certain advantages to doing off-the-shelf, it usually arrives quite quickly and quite efficiently but it does mean there's less ability to influence the design.

One of the key issues for the Council is the various competing standards that have to be achieved but a limited amount of money to fund all the things that are being asked for.

Other comments

- **Will pressure on social housing increase in coming years**

Projections are showing that household numbers – and social housing need – in West Lothian will increase over the next 20 years. With an aging population, the Council is also going to have to deliver a greater diversity of housing type as there will be more pressure around specialist provision.

- **Plans to repurpose empty high streets and former industrial sites**

In Livingston, former industrial sites, call centres and factory units have been cleared to provide housing sites for affordable housing. This is welcome news for the Council as these are central sites and within walking distance to Livingston town centre, whereas some previous developments were on the periphery of the area.

The Council is currently repurposing a former hostel to make four flats. This makes best use of existing stock but can be expensive.

Cardiff City Council

Current housing stock and summary of housing

The Council and 7 partner housing associations have in total almost 24,000 units of social rented accommodation. The Council has the biggest social housing stock in Cardiff with around about 14,500 properties.

What challenges does the Council face on housing needs?

There is a huge gap between the housing need and the housing supply in Cardiff.

- **Waiting list**

The Council has around 8,500 people on its waiting list with a housing need. The gap is huge and the Council's new build programme very much looks at filling the gaps.

- **Right to Buy**

The Right to Buy in Wales was abolished in January 2019. At its peak Cardiff had around 26,000 council homes. Right to Buy has meant this has been reduced to the current figure of 14,500.

Had the scheme been frozen earlier, the Council would most likely have been in a position of having only a couple of thousand on the waiting list.

- **Homelessness**

At any one time. Though this may have changed as a result of the pandemic, the Council has around 300/400 families who are homeless. Due to demand on the housing waiting list, the Council is discharging its duty into the private rented sector.

The local housing allowance, frozen this year – and frozen from 2016-2019 – means that those people the Council are housing in the private rented sector very often have to pay a top-up on their rent. This means the Council is housing people in accommodation which is unaffordable to them.

- **Specialist housing**

The Council is looking to deliver more specialist accommodation as this type of housing generally doesn't come through more traditional routes. The new build programme is tailored to fill the gaps – older people, large families, disabled.

How is the Council meeting housing need?

- **New build programme**

The Council has a target of building 1000 new council homes by 2022, but has a programme that will deliver in excess of 2000 new council homes in the longer term. The Council has been working hard over the last couple of years to put a robust programme of development in place that will deliver around 2,700 new council homes in total.

It was initially a ten-year program but it has since been abridged to eight years. The Council has £450 million set aside to fund the programme.

Over the last few years, Cardiff's social housing sector and the 7 housing associations have delivered, on average, a combined 250 new homes a year, which will increase as the programme progresses.

- **Location of sites and infrastructure**

Following the adaptation of the updated LDP a few years ago, the Council is now seeing the benefit of a number of large-scale LDP sites coming forward and delivering in volume.

A source of difficulty for the Council is the fact that some of these major sites being developed are on the edge of the city. This means that, with regards to infrastructure, those early-stage affordable homes aren't always suitable for tenants most in need because they are not well-connected enough to schools, retail and the public realm. However, the Council is making progress on remedying this.

- **Mixed tenure**

The new build programme involves regenerating council estates but importantly for mixed tenure, not simply social housing. Some of the large-scale developments underway look to bring forward a much better mix of homes; whether that's low-cost home ownership, first-time buyers, social rented council homes or indeed affordable homes for sale as well. The houses are tenure neutral too so, from the look of it, it is very difficult to decipher which is private and which is council.

- **Cardiff Living: Partnership working in action**

Cardiff Living is an innovative and award-winning development partnership between Cardiff Council and Wates Residential that will deliver 1,500 new homes across Cardiff over the next ten years. The ten-year programme will include around 600 homes which will be available to rent or buy via the Council's Assisted Home Ownership Scheme, while the remaining 900 homes will be available for sale on the open market.

Fulfilling a commitment to improve quality of life for residents, the new homes will offer enhanced living environments that will meet high levels of sustainability and energy efficiency. The homes being built for market sale are larger than the standard houses one would traditionally see for market sale. These new homes are in areas where large-scale private sale development doesn't usually take place as the land values and profit margins aren't there. However, every single scheme that has been built with mixed tenure so far has been sold and more often than not they have been sold off-plan to the local market and local buyers.

One of the key objectives of the project, in addition to delivering vital new homes, is to invest in local communities. The project will deliver real community benefits including the creation of long-term local training and employment opportunities.

Each development will also promote physical activity through the built environment. The partnership will prioritise pedestrian travel over motorised transport through the Home Zones concept, creating active travel structures and layouts and promoting access to open spaces and community/retail facilities by walking or cycling.

- **Grangetown Gas Work site**

In 2020 the Council bought a former gas work site in Grangetown with the ambition of building a minimum of 500 new homes. The plans will include family homes, "high density development" and open space and improved transport links. It is likely to be a 50/50 split between social rent and affordable sale but there will also be assisted home ownership properties.

Quality Standards/Design

- **Energy efficiency**

The Council has developed a design standard which, using the Welsh Government standards as a baseline, aspires to build more energy efficient homes in order to tackle fuel poverty. The design standard covers both the market sale and council-owned homes.

- **Spatial standards/access to a garden/public realm**

The Council works to the Design Quality Requirements (DQR) set out by the Welsh Government.

The minimum garden size for homes subject to DQR is 40sq m. The Council is committed to ensuring that all families of the smallest houses can enjoy a reasonable outdoor area, but is flexible in how other forms of amenity space are provided in other residential typologies.

In the wake of the pandemic, the Council is looking at having a dedicated home office space within the properties that aren't also bed spaces (as the current DQR permits). The Council also wants to ensure new properties, flats in particular, have large balconies or access to roof terraces and roof gardens.

Other comments

- **Will pressure on social housing increase in coming years**

The Council is very concerned that, following the lifting of the moratorium on evictions, that rates will rise significantly causing immense pressure on housing need and potentially derailing the Council's rough sleeping strategy.

- **Plans to repurpose empty buildings**

Currently, the Council is working on a couple of small repurposing projects. One project involves the Council acquiring a former office block with the aim of converting it into ground floor office accommodation for Council outreach staff but also flats above for homeless families.

Ashfield District Council

Current housing stock and summary of housing

The Council has around 6,800 properties and owns 14 hectares of land.

What challenges does the Council face on housing needs?

Whilst hundreds of new homes are built each year in Ashfield, only a small number of these are affordable for residents who cannot afford to buy or rent properties on the open market.

- **Supply shortfall**

On average, 57 new affordable homes were delivered in the district each year (2010-2017), largely by private developers under their s.106 affordable housing planning obligations. This means there is a supply shortfall of 223 affordable homes each year. Additionally, whilst the average completion rate of new homes across all tenures each year is 471, as s.106 requirements are a maximum of 25% of a site, relying on this mechanism alone to deliver the affordable homes required in the district is insufficient by a large margin.

- **Demographics and geography**

The district has a moderate north/south divide. Hucknall, in the south, is on the border of the city of Nottingham and is on the city's tram network. Its popularity means residents – many families included – are struggling to get a foothold on the property ladder. Further north in the district, in historically industrial areas like Sutton in Ashfield, there is a higher-than-average predominance of lower end private rented accommodation based on the historic high-density housing built for workers.

Because of how the economics of the area work, the incentive to build single-person accommodation is very small, because the return on investment is so small.

- **Waiting list**

The Council has around 4,000 people on its waiting list. As less than 500 properties become available to let each year, applicants need to be selected in bands which prioritise their need for housing.

At the moment there's only enough stock and turnover in the district to house people at the higher end of the waiting list. This is a real problem for the Council because, unless somebody on the waiting list has a medical or urgent need to be accommodated, they are not going to get a house.

- **Right to Buy**

The Council loses about 50 properties a year due to Right to Buy. The Council's new build programme aims to offset a sizeable chunk of these losses.

- **Specialist housing**

The private sector is quite buoyant but there's a very specific need for single people in the area. Not necessarily young single people but perhaps more those who are middle-aged, whether the kids have left home, a relationship breakdown, vulnerability depend dependencies. Unfortunately, the Council is struggling to accommodate this key area of housing need.

Supported housing is scarce and there are a number of vulnerable people with dependency issues in the local area whose needs are not fully addressed. The Council has to fight for every penny and this is compounded by the support being structured annually. It is therefore impossible to plan support on a long-term strategic basis. This affects both residents and staffing.

The Homeless Review 2018 carried out by Homeless Link identified there is a need for 54 units of supported housing for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

How is the Council meeting housing need?

- **New build programme**

The Council has set a corporate target of building 100 new units by 2024 which it is going to exceed.

As part of the new build programme, the Council is looking at its own housing land – disused garage sites for example – and developing out family accommodation on the basis that the middle strata of people waiting for a home will have a unit to move into.

The new build programme also involves the Council creating disabled adaptive bungalows – something housing associations don't usually do because of viability.

The Council has prioritised developing on its own land initially. There are 27 land sites and 23 garage sites in the Council's ownership to develop on following this. The Council will consider land acquisitions that support the development of these sites. A review of the Council's garage sites has been carried out. This identified 130 garage sites, 23 with development potential. Of these, 17 were considered to be viable and are progressing,

- **Partnership working**

The Council works on a site-by-site basis; sometimes the Council will collaborate with an RP or it will develop units directly, something it is doing a lot more of on smaller sites.

The Council has a good working relationship with RPs. One example of this is where the Council didn't have the skills or abilities to build 22 properties on one scheme so instead partnered with East Midlands Housing Group.

The Council also partners with other RPs on their larger sites to make them viable for the RP whilst also allowing the Council to obtain units at the volume price.

- **Homeless initiatives**

There is currently one supported housing scheme in Ashfield commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council, which provides 12 bed spaces for 16-21 year-olds and 5 bed spaces for 22-25 year-olds.

In the wake of the 'Everybody In' campaign, the Council provided temporary accommodation to around 20 individuals and secured permanent accommodation for 30.

Quality Standards/Design

Unfortunately, the funding model does not allow the Council to build to Passivhaus standard. However, the Council builds all general needs properties to EPC rating B and sheltered at net zero.

- **Lifetime homes**

The Council does a lot of adaptations over the lifetime of its properties – due to the makeup of the district’s demographic – so is now starting to build these adaptations into a lot of new builds so that they are lifetime homes.

For the Council, building net zero homes ought to come with an assurance that these homes will remain in the Council’s stock for a longer period of time or that the investment will be paid back in full. This can be achieved by giving freedom to alter the rent model and/or changes to the Right to Buy cost floor period to acknowledge the higher cost involved.

Other comments

- **Will pressure on social housing increase in coming years**

The pressure from a landlord’s point of view is twofold. Due to funding cuts, a lot of support services have been hollowed out meaning more responsibilities (and strain) is being placed on social landlords. Furthermore, the net zero targets will, without the necessary boost in funding, serve to reduce the supply. Equally the Council are seeing growing demand from people in need with simply not enough units being produced.

